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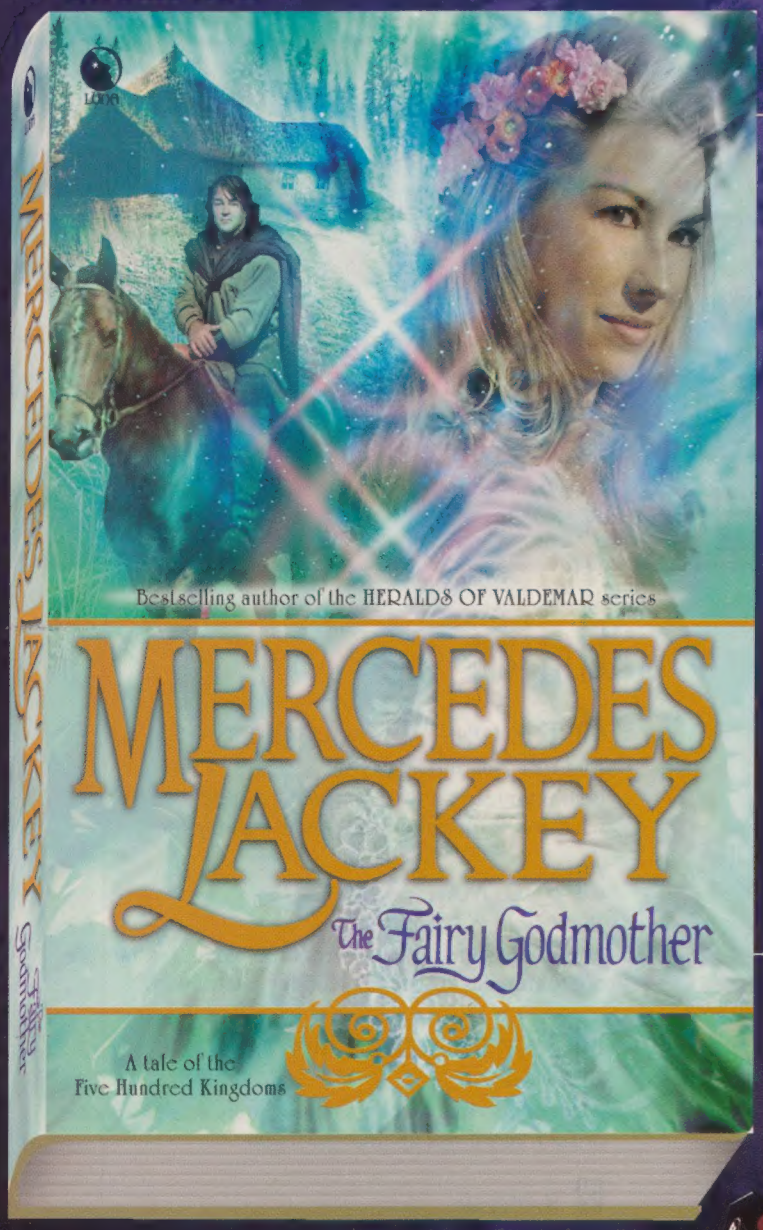

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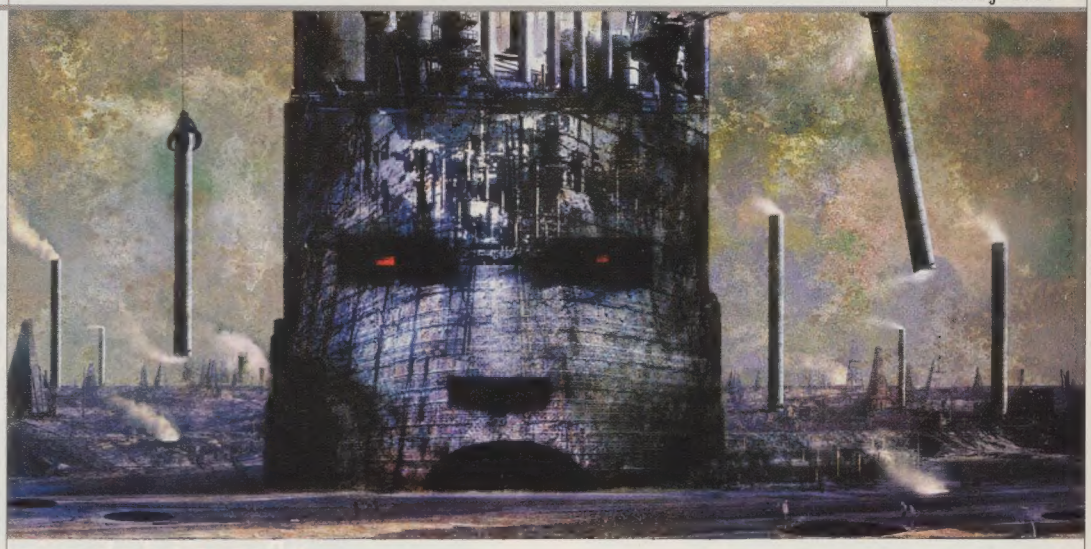

RIGHT: Monster *by Greg Spalenka, who is the subject of this issue's Gallery.*

COVER: Legolas (Orlando Bloom) fights on the side of good in *LOTR: The Return of the King.*

departments

6 CONTRIBUTORS

8 MOVIES
By Resa Nelson
The Lord of the Rings comes full circle with *The Return of the King.*

16 FOLKROOTS
By Ari Berk
The Sampo remains a gift of mystery in the pages of the *Kalevala.*

28 PAST LIVES
By Emma Bull
Finding your place in the past is a matter of skills, apprenticeship, and enthusiasm.

36 BOOKS
By Gahan Wilson and Paul Witcover
Night Shade Books presents the classics of fantasy—past, present, and future.

80 GALLERY
By Karen Haber
Greg Spalenka uses his artist's mirror to reveal the iconography of the human spirit through a balance of light and dark, refinement and rawness.

92 GAMES
By Eric T. Baker
Online gaming brings a new element to the much-loved *Final Fantasy* series.

fiction

46 THE ONE WHO CONQUERS
By Bruce Holland Rogers
Before you start a war, it's always a good idea to know what and (especially) who you're fighting for.

50 STILL MAN
By William R. Eakin
Dark secrets lurk in the heart of the wood, but be sure not to mistake the merely wild for the truly evil.

58 TINY FLOWERS & ROTTEN LACE
By Jay Lake
It doesn't do much good to bury family secrets—sooner or later they'll rise up and crush you.

62 RATTLER
By Gene Wolfe and Brian Hopkins
Who says you can't teach an old Dodge new tricks?

66 THE FLOWERS OF TEKHELI
By Liz Williams
Words are the only things that truly live forever. But if someone is denied the power of speech, can she truly prove that she has lived?

70 POWER SOURCES
By Julia H. West
If the laws of physics are universal, who's to say that the same doesn't hold true for the laws of magic?

88 HEARTS' DESIRES
By Nina Kiriki Hoffman
When offered our heart's desire, how many of us would be brave enough to reach out and take it? Don't answer too quickly ...

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JULIA WEST lives in West Jordan, Utah, with her husband, Brook (who writes fantasy and science fiction), nine cats, and assorted fish, frogs, and snails. The latter don't write fantasy and science fiction (that she knows of). She was Grand Prize Winner in the Writers of the Future contest in 1994. Two stories she collaborated on with Brook appeared in the fantasy anthologies *Enchanted Forests* and *The Shimmering Door*. One of these was recently reprinted in a French anthology, *Emblemes 6: Extreme-Orient*. One of her science fiction stories for children, originally published in *Spider,* has been reprinted in two elementary school readers.

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GENE WOLFE began to write in 1956, shortly after he and his wife Rosemary were married. They needed money for a bed and stove. His first sale was "The Dead Man" to *Sir* in 1965. Since then there have been numerous stories and books, including *The Fifth Head of Cerberus, Peace, The Shadow of the Torturer, The Urth of the New Sun, There Are Doors, Nightside the Long Sun, On Blue Waters, In Green's Jungles,* and *Return to the Whorl*. His short stories have been collected in *The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories, Endangered Species,* and *Strange Travelers*. His work has been given three World Fantasy Awards, two Nebula Awards, the British Fantasy Award, the British Science Fiction Award, and the Deathrealm Award, among others. Although it has never won a Hugo Award, his work has been nominated eight times. So far.

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By Resa Nelson

The Lord of the Rings comes full circle with *The Return of the King.*

Producer Barrie M. Osborne is sitting pretty. He's a Hollywood veteran (*The Matrix, Peggy Sue Got Married, The Big Chill*) who's wrapping up the biggest job in his illustrious career. Still working on the final cut of *The Return of the King* (scheduled for release on December 17 by New Line Cinema), Osborne describes a new facility built in New Zealand by Peter Jackson. "[It's] modeled on Frank Lloyd Wright architecture," Osborne says of the space where he's working at the moment. "It's a great oak-beamed room with stained glass windows. It's such a leap forward from the last few years."

All photos © 2003 Pierre Vinet/New Line Productions

Gandalf (Ian McKellen) strikes a blow to save Middle-Earth in the final battle against evil.

Like the members of the Fellowship, Osborne's journey is about to end. The *Lord of the Rings* trilogy isn't just one of the most successful in movie history—it's the most important movie project, period.

This might as well be known as "A Tale of Two Studios." The project originally began under the wing of Miramax, a studio that champions films known for cleaning up at the Academy Awards—films like *Chicago, The English Patient,* and *Shakespeare in Love.*

"Miramax put it into turnaround because they wouldn't commit to making three [movies] at once," Osborne recalls.

Turnaround is an industry term meaning the studio committed to making a movie is giving up on it before the movie is made. When a movie goes into turnaround, it enters a state of limbo. Any other studio can step in, make a deal, and take over.

"Peter said he had to make at least two [movies], otherwise he couldn't conceive of how to do it," Osborne says.

So Miramax allowed Jackson to pitch *The Lord of the Rings* to other studios. "He went to every studio, and the only one to step up to the plate was Bob Shaye [co-chairman and co-CEO of New Line Cinema]."

New Line Cinema agreed to a three-picture deal. It was an enormous risk that's never been taken in the history of filmmaking. The studio committed hundreds of millions of dollars with no guarantee that any of the films would succeed. If *The Lord of the Rings* movies had failed, New Line would have suffered the greatest folly in movie history.

Did New Line's commitment surprise Osborne?

"Not so much that they took on a trilogy," he says, "but that they agreed to commit to all three films being done at the same time. Yeah, that was quite surprising. To my knowledge, people have committed to two at once but only if the first was successful, and in some cases, only because they had shot so much material for one film that they realized they had two."

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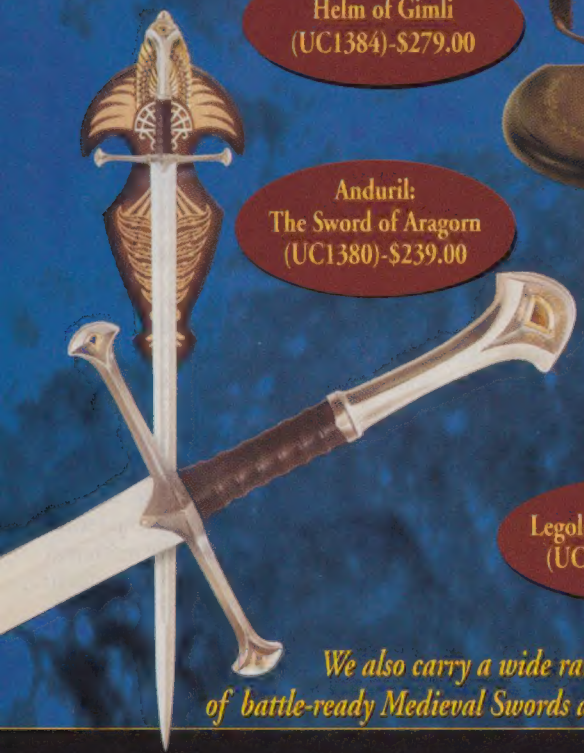

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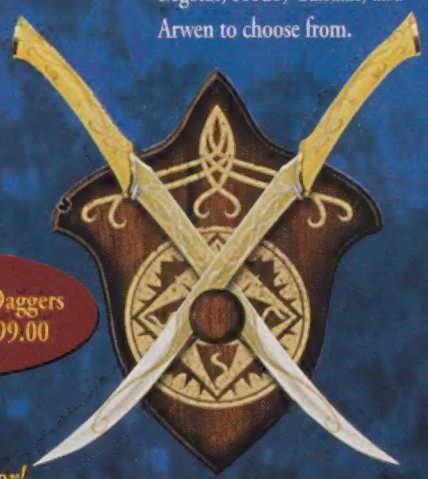

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ABOVE: Sam (Sean Austin) uses Galadriel's gift to light his way. RIGHT: Arwen (Liv Tyler) must choose between staying with Aragorn for the final struggle or living as an immortal.

A case in point is Quentin Tarantino's new flick, *Kill Bill.* Everyone assumed they were making one movie, but at some point it became clear that Tarantino's project couldn't fit into a single film—it made sense to split the movie into two movies: *Kill Bill: Volume I* and *Kill Bill: Volume 2.*

Osborne was the producer of another case in point: After *The Matrix* proved to be a hit, the studio committed to making two sequels.

"So to my knowledge, no one has ever committed to three films where the concept is untested," Osborne continues. "Although I've talked to Shaye, and he felt great confidence that the novel had such a large following that as long as we didn't blow it and make a bad movie that it was a fairly safe bet."

Oddly enough, the combination of Miramax's abandonment and New Line's embracement of *The Lord of the Rings* led to nothing short of serendipity.

Initially, Miramax poured plenty of cash into *The Fellowship of the Ring,* and Jackson made good use of it. It wasn't until New Line acquired *The Lord of the Rings* in turnaround that Osborne entered the picture. After preliminary meetings in Hollywood, Osborne flew to New Zealand to talk turkey with Peter Jackson.

What Osborne saw when he arrived in New Zealand convinced him that Jackson knew what he was doing.

"The WETA workshop was in the middle of building the Elven armor," Osborne says. "I walked in and saw racks of just really great looking, Art Deco-style armor. Shelves and racks and racks of it. I was very impressed with it.

"I knew that this was going to be a very special production. That the effort and degree of detail that went into the work from the time it was first started with Miramax through the time that I was not even yet on the picture—the work in the art department, the costume department, the weaponry, the armor—was beyond anything you could imagine. The quality was like walking into a museum. The craftsmanship and the work was so authentic and real-feeling that I knew we had a special film."

Ironically, turnaround gave Jackson and company extra time. They needed it. Suddenly, with New Line in charge, Jackson was now making three movies. More time meant more opportunity to add rich, lush texture to the films.

"Normally when you scrap a movie and it goes into turnaround it seems like a great tragedy," Osborne says. "Sometimes movies never recover from that. In our case, I think it actually became a huge advantage, because the movies had started being prepped under Miramax's reign … for at least nine months. It was with New Line in prep for over a year. That was almost two years of preparation."

And as we've all seen, that preparation paid off in the first two movies of the trilogy.

In *The Fellowship of the Ring,* hobbit Frodo Baggins volunteers to take the most powerful ring in Middle-Earth to Mordor and destroy evil forever. He enlists the help of a fellowship of hobbits (Sam, Merry, and Pippin), the wizard Gandalf, the elf Legolas, the dwarf Gimli, and the men Aragorn and Boromir, who is killed while protecting Merry and Pippin from an attack of Orcs.

The Two Towers follows each group of the-broken fellowship. Merry and Pippin are kidnapped by Orcs, but the hobbits join forces with Treebeard and his fellow Ents. While trying to rescue the hobbits, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli enter Rohan, a territory of men. They are soon joined by Gandalf, sent back to Middle-Earth until his task is done. When Rohan is invaded, they win the battle at Helm's Deep. Meanwhile, Frodo and Sam are guided toward Mordor by Gollum, who plots to kill them and steal the ring.

The Return of the King concludes the trilogy with the battle for Middle-Earth and the end of Frodo's quest to destroy the ring.

Osborne describes what audiences can look forward to seeing in *The Return of the King*: "As in the first two films, there are certain liberties you take for dramatic purposes, but I think that we follow the novel very closely and we definitely follow the spirit and intent, and we focus on telling the story. Peter has done a remarkable job of staying very close to that.

"It has the same epic tapestry that the other films are set in, but it has an emotional payoff so the dramatic emotional epic is really strong. It's what I like most in general terms. In specifics, it is the ending and the resolution of the characters and what happens to them at the end of the story. I think it's extremely satisfying.

"Gollum remains a breathtaking character," Osborne continues. "I love what Andy Serkis has brought to that role. Beyond that, the biggest battle of all is the battle for Middle- Earth, and that's great and very well done. There are elements that are new and unique and different and go way beyond the

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Helm's Deep battle."

One of the greatest strengths of all three movies is the result of an unusual decision made by Jackson. Typically, one of the first steps in making a film is finalizing the screenplay. When making a small independent film, a script might undergo a handful of rewrites. When making a blockbuster, a script is more likely to be rewritten 50 times by one or more screenwriters, incorporating comments and requests from producers and the director. Typically, it's the finished script that dictates everything from finding locations to designing costumes to casting.

Jackson turned the process on its head by reversing it, as actor Bernard Hill (who plays King Theoden) learned the hard way.

Initially, Hill was reluctant to join the cast. In his native England, Hill requested the screenplay for *The Two Towers* but was shocked when he read it. "The script arrived, and I said, 'There's absolutely no way I'm going to do this,' because the script was just a basic condensing of the book," Hill says. "There was no dialogue in it."

Hill was even more taken aback when he confronted Jackson and his writers. "They said, 'We're actually working in quite a special way. It's a very early-stage draft.' And I said, 'Can I see a later-stage draft?' And they said, 'We'd rather you didn't.'"

Actor Sean Bean (who plays Boromir) and Hill's agent convinced Hill to take a leap of faith. It wasn't until he arrived in New Zealand that he discovered what was at the heart of Jackson's secrecy.

Using Tolkien's books, Jackson and fellow screenwriters Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens had condensed the novels with the intent of inviting the actors to play a pivotal part in developing their own roles and dialogue.

"[Jackson and Walsh] have a big office in the attic [of their home], a very modern office with lots of modern technology," Hill says. "Basically, you went up there and sat there for the day and talked about the script and the way you thought the character should go and what you thought should be in the following scenes. And you developed it from that dehydrated form [the condensed novel] into roughly what appeared on the screen in script form."

At the same time, the shooting schedule often placed heavy demands on the actors. Because of the extraordinary expense involved in moviemaking, savvy filmmakers look for ways to film in the most efficient way possible. One common strategy is to shoot a movie out of sequence, especially when shooting on location. In other words, the first scene of a movie usually isn't filmed on the first day of production, and the last scene usually isn't the last scene filmed. Instead, all scenes that take place in any given location are likely to be shot at the same time, and not necessarily in the same order they occur in the film.

It's an especially big challenge for the

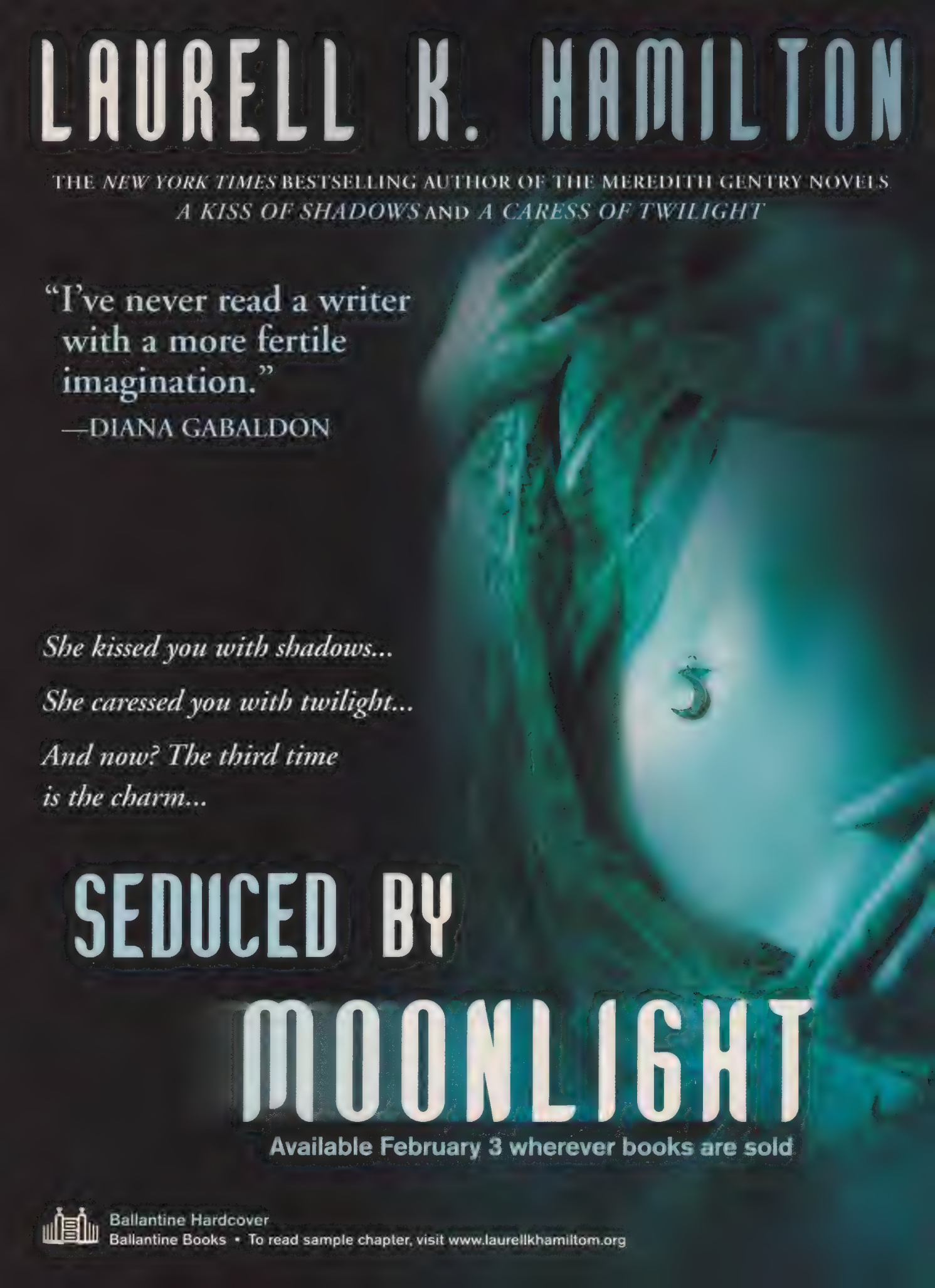
Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen) prepares to fight Sauron's evil forces.

actors. Stage actors have the luxury of building their characters' emotions in "real time" on stage. Film actors have to be prepared to remember not only their dialogue and actions for any scene, but they also have to remember where their characters are in terms of emotions. They have to show what the character feels. The heart of any film is the emotional arc of the characters, meaning, Who are the characters at the beginning of the film and how have they changed by its end? Shooting out of sequence can be one of the greatest challenges any actor faces, and the challenge of *The Lord of the Rings* was a triple threat.

"We started out thinking we would shoot, not in continuity, but we'd do all of movie one first, then movie two, and then movie three," Osborne says. "But as it turned out, for all the usual reasons that you normally shoot out of continuity, it became even more so on our film. We had certain actors like Ian Holm, Christopher Lee, Brad Dourif, and a number of actors who were here on a much more limited basis [than the actors playing the main characters]. To accommodate their deals and make them affordable for our pictures, their work was consolidated, which meant that we had to shoot out of sequence."

In other words, all three movies weren't shot back to back. Scenes from all three movies were shot at the same time.

"Some of the actors did scenes from all three movies in the same day, which is a big strain on them," Osborne says. He explains that one actor might shoot a scene from *The Fellowship of the Ring* in the morning with Jackson in one location, then fly by helicopter to another location to shoot a scene from *The Two Towers* with a different director, and finally end the day by traveling to yet another location and film a scene from *The Return of*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ABOVE: Gollum, the 500-year-old creature consumed with the desire to possess the Ring, is back in The Return of the King. *Because of the character's successful creation, and the input of actor Andy Serkis, Peter Jackson expanded Gollum's role in the films. RIGHT: The Orcs, part of Sauron's forces, are as vicious as they look.*

the King with yet another director. All in the same day.

"The work was hard," says actor Elijah Wood (who plays Frodo). "It was certainly the most difficult experience of my life in that sense, because the hours were unbelievable. Simply being able to keep the energy, to stay alive during the process, was very hard. It demanded so much of us. On the other side of it, we were so utterly passionate about what we were doing, it was easier than it would be normally, because we so loved each other and so loved the film that it was always a pleasure … but, my God, I've never been so exhausted in my life."

Through it all, Jackson acted like a master conductor, overseeing everything.

Karl Urban (who plays Eomer) recalls his impression of Jackson at work. "Peter had an amazing sense of humor. I never once saw him panicked or lose his temper. There he was, every day, with five or six monitors in front of him and he would be directing three or four units in the vicinity by cell phone or radio. And you could go up to him with a question about character or any related matter, and he would be calm and specific and to the point."

Yet another trail blazed by Jackson and his team is the concept of offering the theatrical version of each movie on DVD, plus a different DVD of an extended version.

While some DVDs might offer director's cuts, deleted scenes, or alternate endings, *The Lord of the Rings* movies are the first to offer significantly extended versions. In other words, the extended version is a seamless film in which existing scenes are longer and extra scenes are included—and the extended version has been edited just as carefully as the theatrical release in terms of special effects, scoring, and every detail imaginable.

So what inspired the filmmakers to come up with the idea of extended versions of each movie for DVD?

"When we were putting the cut together for *Fellowship*, we felt there were a lot of things that we couldn't fit into the film," Osborne says. "And we agreed among ourselves that we were not willing to let go of them."

One of actor John Rhys-Davies' (who plays Gimli) favorite scenes didn't make it into the theatrical release of *The Fellowship of the Ring*—but the filmmakers liked it enough to include it in the DVD extended version.

"I think that he recognizes the virtues and the strengths in others very readily," Rhys-Davies says of Gimli. "I don't think there's a moment of jealousy between him and anybody else, except possibly for the elves. It's sabotage when he falls in love with the queen of the elves. Everyone else is asking for gifts, and she's giving gifts away. And he says, 'Naw, I don't want anything.'

"Look at her response. See what her face does. See if she does that ever again with anybody else. Then he says, 'There is something that you can give me: just one hair from your head.' She gave me three.

"It's a lovely moment. It's funny, it's sad. And it's spot on. I, just once or twice as a boy, met older girls with whom I fell completely and irrevocably in love. I think there's childlike innocence in that. I think we retain that as adults, as well. I think we're all susceptible to that."

Osborne talks about one of his own favorites. For *The Two Towers*, he encouraged the screenwriters to include a scene that failed to make the theatrical cut but is included in the DVD extended version. "[It's] a scene that explains who Faramir was. In the novel it's OK that he comes out of nowhere, but in the film he comes in really late in the story and you don't get to know who he is. We did do a scene that shows a little bit of his background."

Does that mean audiences can look forward to an extended version of *The Return of the King* when it's released on DVD?

"Until we complete the theatrical version, who knows?" Osborne says. "But we've already discussed an extended version of *The Return of the King*."

At the same time, Osborne notes that there's a chance the December 17 release might run slightly longer than the theatrical versions of the first two movies in the trilogy.

As the journey ends, Osborne finds his life changed. He now owns a home in New Zealand, and he's producing films in New Zealand and Australia, although he still stays connected to Hollywood. He finds himself with new friendships formed with both cast and crew members who worked on *The Lord of the Rings*. His voice grows wistful as he recalls the emotional good-byes he's already said to many of them.

"When you sit back and watch the movie—I hate to say things like this, but it feels like a classic film," Osborne admits. "It feels like the trilogy will be around for many, many years. They have broken a lot of ground."

The Lord of the Rings trilogy has not only broken ground but blazed many trails. It is the most remarkable and ambitious filmmaking endeavor in history, and it has raised the bar for an entire industry.

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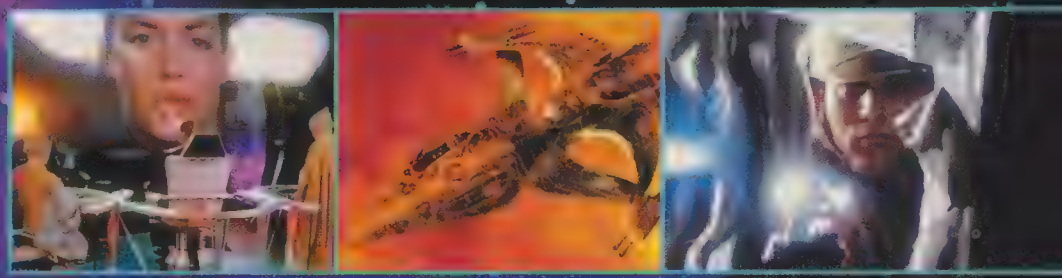

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By Ari Berk

The Sampo remains a gift of mystery in the pages of the *Kalevala.*

Defending the Sampo by Akseli Gallen-Kallela. Courtesy of the Gallen-Kallela Museum

At sea between one world and another, the heroes of the Kalevala must defend the Sampo during their flight from Northland.

Shall I start to sing
Shall I begin to recite
With a good man as a partner
wo who grew up together?
Come, let us put hand in hand
And finger in finger-gap
Each grip in the other's grip.
One word from you, one from me
Splendid speech from both:
We will shape our mouths
We will pitch our tunes
Like two kanteles
Like five or six gates
Three doors of a hut.

(Kuusi: 81)

So begins the Prologue to the outstanding collection, *Finnish Folk Poetry Epic.* Within the Finnish lore are words of sharing, songs of partnership, charms of invitation from across the ages. Many have heard these songs and accepted the call of an ancient chorus. Many have heard the music of the Northland and followed it back to the beginning of the world. The words are still here, hanging on the air, waiting to be answered.

A Vision Shared

When Tolkien created his Middle-Earth, he imbued that world with mythic resonance, with word-music and place-magic giving his characters and landscape depth, vitality, and a sense of actual existence. One of the ways he accomplished this was by drawing from his impressive knowledge of the early literature and lore of the Northern world and particularly of Finland. Indeed, there may be no greater storehouse of ancient European myth and legend than the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala* (assembled by the scholar Elias Lönnrot in the 19th century), and the hundreds of songs and spells that have been collected from Finnish oral tradition since the 19th century.

"Perhaps because of their geographical remoteness, the Finnish tales and songs possessed—Tolkien believed—a truly Northern mythology unsullied by contact with the rest of Europe. Certainly they retain strong connections to a mythic world that thrived before the advancing of an Industrial Age. Now no myth or culture exists in a vacuum, but the particular ancientness and singular eloquence of Finnish lore provided Tolkien with the inspiration to create such a mythology for his own country of England. One branch of his elvish language is founded upon the sound of Finnish, and several of the gods in his *Silmarillion*—Ulmo and Illúvatar—bear names highly reminiscent of gods from the Finnish pantheon—Ilmo and Ilmatar" (Shippey, 215).

Yet, Tolkien was not the first teller of tales to define and associate the Finnish myths and people with otherworldly artistry and authority. Some of the early written accounts of the Finns contained in Olaus Magnus's *A Description of the Northern Peoples* (1555) establish both respectful and wary opinions of the power of Finnish spells and enchantment among their neighbors. Magnus begins with a general com-

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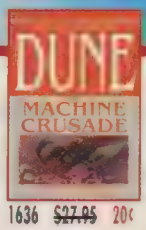

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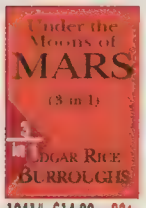

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Painting by Vladmir Fomin

Wanting to keep the Sampo with her in Northland, Louhi pursues Ilmarinen and Väinämöinen out to sea in the shape of an eagle. The contest of ownership of the Sampo leads to its loss.

ment and then a specific example of one common type of Finnish magic:

"I would first like to say this: that Finland, the northernmost land, together with Lappland, was once during pagan times as learned in witchcraft as if it had had Zoroaster the Persian for its instructor.... There was a time when the Finns ... would offer wind for sale to traders who were detained on their coasts by offshore gales, and when payment had been brought would give them in return three magic knots tied in a strap not likely to break. This is how these knots were to be managed: when they undid the first they would have gentle breezes; when they unloosed the second the winds would be stiffer; but when they untied the third they must endure such raging gales that, their strength exhausted, they would have no eye to look out for rocks from the bow, nor a footing either in the bottom of the ship to strike the sails or at the stern to guide the helm" (Book III, 172-173).

Like most early modern ethnographic writers, Magnus employs a comparative method, evoking the name of the famous Persian sorcerer Zoroaster to shroud the Finns in foreign mysticism for his readers. The example of wind-related enchantment is significant. Depicting them as wind traders and controllers, Magnus makes an important association between Finnish magic and the natural world. Despite the reference to foreign Zoroaster, the Finns are not defined as conjurors of spirits, but as indigenous natural wizards, conjuring and controlling the powers abounding in the sea, land, and air around them.

In another account, Magnus relates the trouble encountered by a Swedish hero, Arngrim, when battling against the Finns:

"They devote themselves no less to magical skills. and know how to receive or inflict blows by attacking and fleeing on curved boards across the snowfields. These men Arngrim assaulted and crushed, as Saxo testifies, for the sake of winning fame. After they had had the worst of the conflict and had dispersed in flight, they threw behind them three pebbles and made them appear to their foes like three mountains. Arngrim therefore, stunned by the uncertainty of his deluded vision, recalled his troops from the pursuit, believing that he was cut off from the enemy by a wall of towering cliffs. The next day they encountered him again and, when they were beaten, scattered snow on the ground, giving it the semblance of a mighty river. The Swedes, utterly deceived by the illusion, completely misread the situation and thought that an extraordinary volume of roaring waters lay before them. As the victors quaked at this meaningless apparition, the Finns made good their escape" (Book V, 256).

Magnus is dismissive of the craft of illusion, but again, he allows us to perceive the intrinsically associative nature of Finnish magic. It is tied to the landscape, born out of the rocks and snows. It is part of the landscape and can, if needed, rise up out of even the smallest piece of stone to muddle the minds of their enemies. It is as if the land itself comes to the aid of the Finns, producing mirrors of its mountains and the shadow of its waters to protect those people who know how to call upon it.

Not only associative, the Finnish mythic landscape is a fully sentient world. Trees speak, animals talk, and every living thing holds the potential for communication if the right words are spoken, if the right charms, or runes, are sung. But because the natural world is alive, often following its own concerns and agendas irrespective of human needs, that world is also dangerous. Animals, plants, and places could harm a person physically and spiritually, and so many kinds of charms were needed to help mortals and deities negotiate a potentially perilous world.

The varied categories of Finnish lore, many of which are found in the wonder-filled landscape of the *Kalevala,* are as wide as the Northern winter. In addition to the tales included in the *Kalevala,* Lönnrot edited and published a large collection of magical songs and classified their contents under headings to denote their purposes and use.

He begins with 18 general formulas which he calls *preliminary* (used when the magician was about to begin conjuring), *defensive* (used while on a journey to defend against attacks of witches and evil wishers), *envy* (used to ward off the ill effects of jealous glances), *vengeance* (used to inspire fear in an enemy), *origination* (used in healing the sick by detecting the origin of a disease, if such was uncertain), *reparation* (used to invoke the originator or cause of any injury or disease to repair the damage it had caused), *inflammation* (used for snake bites), *expulsion* (used to cure many diseases, but especially those caused by elf-shot and witchcraft), *posting* (recited after an expulsion or menacing formula), *pain* (used to comfort aches and contusions), *reproaching* (used after a snake bite or wound caused by an animal; also for toothache and wounds caused from fire, cold, and natural causes), *ecstasy* (used to make the magician invigorated), *distressed* (used to address sudden attacks of disease or pain), *boasting* (used to build confidence and disparage a foe), *stilling* (used to assuage great pain), *menacing* (these were added after an expulsion charm when it had proved insufficient), *exorcising* (used to dispel curses, evil spells, and disease caused by witchcraft), and *fastening* (charms used to hold evil spirits motionless). Then he designates 40 liberating or healing charms; 52 classes of magic spells and charms to be recited on such occasions as divining, hunting, fishing, and marriage etc.; 73 classes of prayers; and finally, 51 births or origins of animals and things *(FLS,* Vol. 1, 1890, 19-20).

Because of the sheer breadth of the subject of Finnish songs and stories (far too vast for even a long article) I have chosen the songs whose words I love for their sound (even in translation), seeming simplicity, essential nature, and deep mysteries: the origin of cats, dogs, and boats and the forging of the Sampo. The blood of the North is in such songs, for even the simplest of them when unfolded can uncover for outsiders to Finnish culture a landscape of wonders and complex mythic ideas.

Beginnings

In myths and songs about the origins of things in the world, we have a unique opportunity to learn something of the metaphorical language of a culture. Within the brief poem

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about the cat's making, we can yet perceive a complex socio-sexual commentary.

The Origin of the Cat

I know of the cat's origin—the incubation of Greybeard.
The cat was gotten on a stove—as a girls' nose, a hare's head, a tail of "Hiisi's Plait of Hair," claws of a viper, a tail of snake's venom
Feet of cloudberries, the rest of its body is of the wolf's race.

(FLS, Vol. 1, 1890, 30)

Painting by Vladimir Fomin

Born of longing, fire, and forge, the Sampo begins its journey as an expression and embodiment of the heart's desire of Ilmarinen the smith.

Hiisi was once a forest god, thought to be the *genius loci* (or guardian spirit) of the sacrificial groves. After the arrival of Christianity, he became associated with evil, and even the devil. Hiisi's symbolic relationship with the cat may be a statement regarding the creature's previously wild nature, dubious forest origins, or general connections with witchcraft as a familiar spirit (a common belief across Europe). This name, along with the descriptions "venomous" and "of the wolf's race" establish the cat as not only a predator, but one with otherworldly ability and a propensity for ill-wishing. References to stoves and a "girl's nose" may draw attention to the domestic nature of the cat's magic by its association with women generally. This is an unpleasant but common irony of northern European folklore: women's power is often suspect and ill-aspected, even in the familiar domestic sphere. The cat, a hearth creature by nature, comes to share these associations, which were doubtless amplified by its nocturnal activities (although every cat's own innate propensity for evil should not be too quickly dismissed here).

The Origin of the Dog

I know of course dog's genesis, I guess a puppy's origin.
He was made on a dust heap—prepared on a meadow.
Begotten of eight fathers, born of one mother.
Earth's mistress, Manuhutar, knocked out a head from a knoll
Procured legs from fence stakes—ears of a waterlily's leaves,
Struck out gums from the east wind, formed the muzzle from wind.

(*FLS*, Vol. 1, 1890, 31)

The name "Manuhutar" derives from "manu," meaning "the dry land," and variants of this creation song name *Louhi*, the great witch of *Pohjola*, the Northland, as the mother of the dog. The "dry land" is here used as another word for "Northland," the place (see below) where great evil resides, quests are directed, and magical objects are installed and subsequently stolen back. The song refers to the time Louhi slept with her back to the wind. It was the wind that made her pregnant and after three month's time, she was lightened of her litter. The "Pinefrost crone" swaddled the dog then in her own linen and from this time, the useful dog that "does not eat one up, does not bite the very least" was known (*FLS*, Vol. 1, 1890, 30). Much of this song and related tale remain a mystery. Perhaps it is the wind's howling that caused it to be designated as the dog's father. Or perhaps, like so many gifts of the Northland that have dubious beginnings, the dog came to be associated with useful companionship when people simply began to trust it.

Vital to our understanding of the Finnish magical world is the connection between words and actions. Not idle poetry, nor mere memories of events long past, songs as such as these were the very word-events that brought creatures and things into the world.

When Väinämöinen needed a boat, he sang one for himself.

The Origin of the Boat

Good old "Väinämöinen," the soothsayer as old as time,
Made a boat by magic knowledge, prepared a skiff by means of song from the fragments of a single oak, from the breakage of a brittle tree.
He cut the boat upon a mountain—caused loud clatter on a rock.
He sang a song, he fixed the keel; he sang another, he joined a plank.
Immediately he sang a third while setting in his place the prow,
While ending off a timber knee which he was clinching end to end,
While setting up the gunwale boards, while he was cutting at the tholes.
A boat was completely finished that could bowl along with speed.
Both stiff when sailing with the wind and safe when sailing against the wind.

(FLS, Vol. 2, 1891, 43)

And so we must see that any boat over which such songs were sung became the original boat, sung down from Väinämöinen's mind, strong in magic and the wood and words of the first world.

The *Kalevala*'s Sampo Songs

Although composed into an artificial elegance by Elias Lönnrot in the 19th century, it is the force of Väinämöinen's clever songs that drive the *Kalevala*. In the *Kalevala*, we can learn much about the adventures of Väinämöinen, the master of songs and most famous Finnish cultural hero. The *Kalevala's* pages are replete with tellings of creations and destructions, beginnings and endings, giants and riddles, charms and runes, lamentations of loss, the forging of the sun and moon. And Väinämöinen had a hand in much of this. But it is within the Sampo runes or songs of the *Kalevala* that the full and subtle Finnish expression of the sacred reaches its poetic pinnacle through an artifact of both beauty and obscurity. A mill? An idol? Its true form unknown, the Sampo is the embodiment of creative achievement, beauty, greed, and the anxiety of loss inherent in any ultimately fading human endeavor.

The story of the Sampo begins with longing. Well, things always do, don't they? It is within the heart that passion has its first forge. So even before the fertile Sampo was brought into being by smith Ilmarinen's hands, its potential begins to form in the words of love spoken by Väinämöinen that set the smith's heart turning with desire.

Old Väinämöinen uttered: 'I have much to tell:
There is a maid in the Northland
A lass in the cold village
Who will not accept bridegroom....
Smith Ilmarinen
You everlasting craftsman
Go and fetch the maid
Look for the braid-head!
If you can forge the Sampo
Brighten the bright-lid
You'll get the maid for your pay
For your work the lovely girl.

(Bosley, 107)

Here, the yet unforged Sampo is suggested as a bride price and may in this way shed some light on its possible metaphorical meanings. Worth the value of a bride, the Sampo comes to symbolize aspects of fertility and abundance, the hopes of a fertile and balanced marriage. Such domestic relationships are themselves symbolic of human hopes for engagements with the lands they

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live on. The ways we live on the land establish sacred relationships that benefit from our attention and good husbandry. Such attentions in turn foster prosperity of crops and abundant living.

Ilmarinen takes the advice of Väinämöinen and journeys to Northland where Louhi, dark crone of Pohjola, is already expecting him. It seems she does not recognize him at first, but she knows of the Sampo, though it has not yet been forged.

Then the Mistress of Northland
Inquired of the newcomer:
'Have you come to see,
Hear and know about
That Ilmarinen the Smith
The most skillful of craftsmen?
He has long been waited for
And ages longed for, here
In furthest Northland
To make up the new Sampo.'

(Bosley, 111)

We learn that she waits for the "new" Sampo, perhaps indicating that this is not the first one, or that the Sampo is part of some larger cycle of events or patterns of exchange between the various worlds of the *Kalevala*.

Hoping to win Louhi's daughter, Ilmarinen stays in Northland and sets about forging the Sampo which will then become the price of the marriage. Like the hopeful outcome of a marriage, the Sampo is not so much fashioned initially as it is born from the forge. And like a child, it is after its birth that a parent's skill in directing its ultimate character and nature is needed. From under the forge, the Sampo, its "bright-lid growing," begins to crown.

Smith Ilmarinen
At the third day's end
Leaned over to look
At his forge's underside—
Saw the Sampo being born
A bright-lid growing.
Then the Smith Ilmarinen
The everlasting craftsman
He hammers away
He taps-taps away.
He forged the Sampo with skill;
On one side there's a corn mill
On the second a salt mill
A money mill on the third.
And then the new Sampo ground
And the bright-lid rocked;
Ground a binful at twilight—
One binful to eat
Another it ground to sell
And a third to store at home.

(Bosley, 117)

This is our fullest physical description of the Sampo. It produces wealth of three kinds and rocks like a machine, but its actual form remains obscure. But, as we will see, this obscurity is a vital aspect of the Sampo's power to generate inspiration and desire, as well as prosperity.

The Hag of the North was pleased;
Then she took the great Sampo
Into Northland's rocky hill
Inside the slope of copper
And behind nine locks.
There she rooted roots
To a depth of nine fathoms;
Sank one root in Mother Earth
And one in a riverbank
And a third in the home-hill.

(Bosley, 117)

Hidden away within the living earth of Northland, the Sampo became the abundant churn of Otherworldly wealth. As Ilmarinen points out, with the Sampo under her control, Louhi's land waxes in riches:

... with the Sampo in Northland ...
There is plowing, there is sowing,
There are all kinds of growing
There is good luck forever.

(Bosley, 514)

It is perhaps this glowing report (and the fact that Ilmarinen returned home without his promised bride) that leads Väinämöinen and Ilmarinen to mount an expedition by sea back to Northland to retrieve the Sampo. Understandably, Louhi is unwilling to return the new source of Northland's fertility. Upon arriving, Väinämöinen and Ilmarinen are challenged by Northland's Mistress who asks them, "What message do the men have? What news the fellows?" Väinämöinen answers her.

The men's message concerns the Sampo

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The fellow's news the bright-lid:
We've come to share the Sampo
To look out for the bright-lid:
She, the Mistress of Northland
Uttered a word and spoke thus:
'No grouse can be shared by two
Nor a squirrel by three men.
'Tis good that the Sampo hums
And the bright-lid turns away
Within Northland's rocky hill
And inside the copper slope;
It is good too that I am
Keeper of the great Sampo.

(Bosley 54)

We must wonder if it is only her refusal to share abundance that justifies the Sampo's eventual theft by Väinämöinen. Her words imply that the Sampo is too small a thing to be shared amongst two or three people (or perhaps more than one world or land), but can this really be true of the wondrous "mill" that daily grinds out so much wealth within the hills of Northland? We may also see this as a reasonable assertion of feminine ownership of any object associated with fertility magic. So deciding that its power must be shared, Väinämöinen, makes his intentions regarding the Sampo clear:

Steady old Väinämöinen
Uttered a word and spoke thus:
"If you'll not give a part, that
Other half of a Sampo
We shall carry off the lot.

Painting by Vladimir Tonin

Originally forged as a bride-price, the Sampo is the mythic heart of the Finnish national epic, the Kalevala, and endures as mysterious symbol of fortune, fertility, and Otherworldly power.

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We shall take it to our boat.'"

(Bosley, 547)

It was said that Louhi, Mistress of Northland, took that very badly. She then convened all the warriors of Northland and set off after Väinämöinen and the Sampo. This kind of myth of theft and pursuit is not uncommon in northern Europe. One of the earliest mentions of King Arthur, in the Welsh mystery-poem, the "Spoils of Annwn," sings of Arthur's harrowing voyage into the Otherworld to seek and steal a cauldron that would, over time, become the archetype for the Grail.

Kept and protected in the Otherworld, such objects function as hallows, but can become personifications of mortal desire as well. We have always sought to control nature. Now modern science follows myth in this regard: we mutate seeds, affect the weather, and bend the cycles of nature to serve human needs. But unlike the myths, science has not yet learned to see the end of the story. In myths, those who seek too much control over nature often lose whatever gains they may have won from the gods. Such mythic losses may also be reflections of larger, seasonal cycles of loss, yearning, quest, and attainment.

In Northland, the Sampo ground out abundance, but when it was stolen back, it was broken and its thieves/rescuers were furiously pursued. Perhaps the great beauty and fertile powers of the Sampo made it inappropriate for the mortal-, or middle-world. Its perfection established it as a holy thing, worthy of memory, and its keeping-place would then need to be (perhaps should have remained) in the Otherworldly Northland where the forces of the ever-fading mortal world could not diminish it. In this way, too, the Sampo shares some similarities with other well-known quest objects—the Grail and Excalibur—that are lent to or quested for by mortals. Such artifacts must eventually find their way back to the unfading Otherworld, reinstalled within the realm of memory where they can continue to inspire successive generations of makers and seekers.

At the end of the Sampo songs, after a sea-chase, Louhi (now in the form of an eagle) is struck by Väinämöinen with an oar. Wounded, but with one talon left, she reaches for the Sampo, but then drops it into the sea where it breaks apart.

Although clever Väinämöinen might not have foreseen the breaking of the Sampo, even its shattered pieces retained some portions of their original power and so continue to serve a purpose.

So some of those bits, those great
Fragments of the Sampo went
Below the quiet waters
Down into the black mud;
There they were left for the water
Treasures for Ahto-land's folk.
That's why never in this world
Not in a month of Sundays will the water go without
Or its Ahto lack treasures.

(Bosley, 569)

By telling its story, keeping its bright-lid (a threshold to and reminder of whatever mystery once dwelled within it), and knowing that the other parts of it are buried in the sea ("Ahto-land"), people may still partake of the Sampo's song won through Väinämöinen and Ilmarinen's bold quest. The spoils of such tales are too compelling to be kept by a single hand or spoken by a single mouth alone. Their wisdom has become part of the great sea's bounty: plentiful, more than enough to be shared by all.

Shall I start to sing
Shall I begin to recite ...
One word from you, one from me
Splendid speech from both ...

(Kuusi: 81)

Even as it appears to us now in a purely literary form, the Sampo remains a gift of mystery, the embodiment of the numinous. It is never described in enough detail to guess its identity. It is a word without a referent. But this mystery is surely part of the Sampo's power if not its purpose, for to inspire questions and quests is a particular definition of the sacred. The Sampo is broken and lost, but we may still tell its story. It continues to sing in Finnish myth and the pages of the *Kalevala* as an axis of Otherworldly wonder about which human hopes of artistic and spiritual attainment may, at every moment, begin to form. ❧

Further Readings

The Kalevala by Keith Bosley

Finnish Folk Poetry—Epic, edited by Matt Kuusi, Keith Bosley, and Michael Branch

Folk-Lore—A Quarterly Review (Folk-Lore Society), Vols. 1 and 2, 1890-1

Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend, edited by Maria Leach

A Description of Northern Peoples 1555, 3 vols., by Olaus Magnus (ed. P.G. Foote)

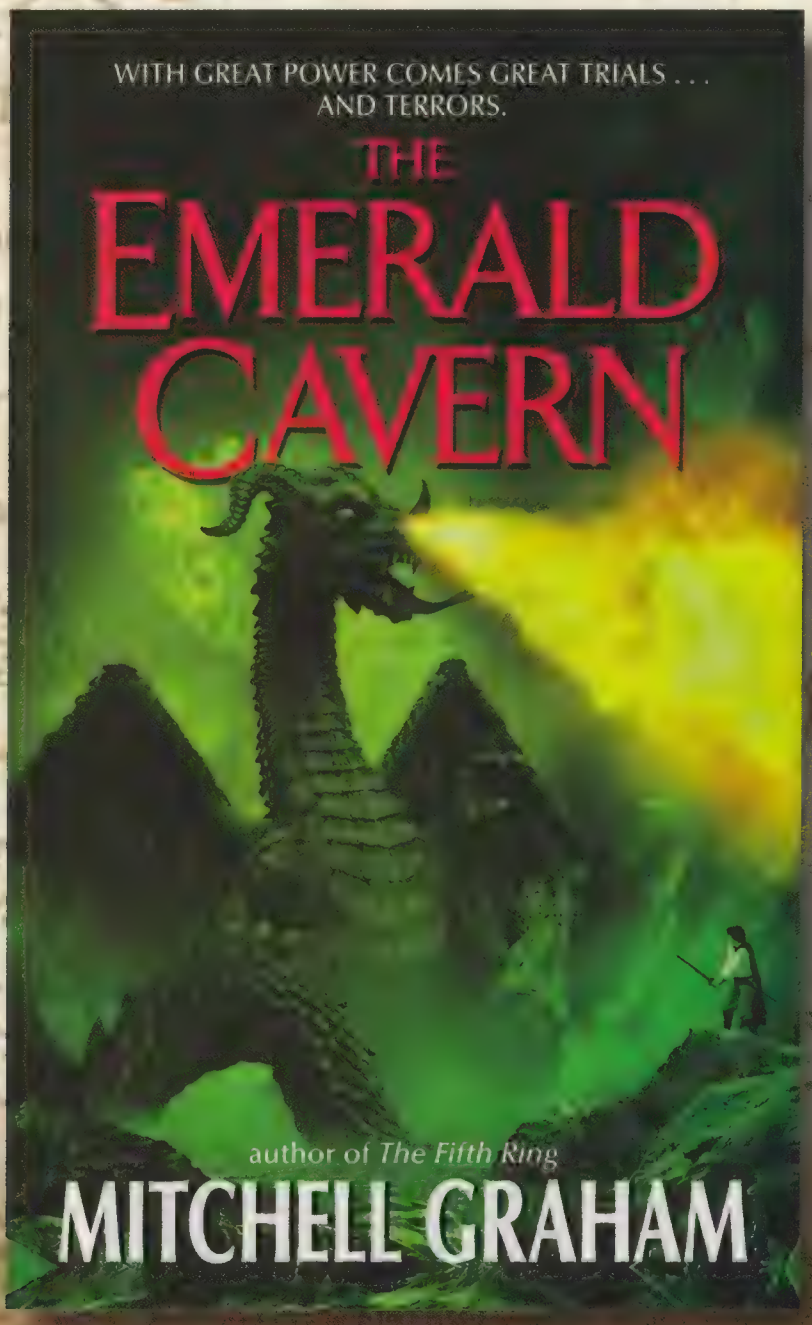
The Road to Middle-Earth: How J.R.R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology, T.A. Shippey

Also of Note:

The Lemminkainen Suite, symphonic music based on four legends from the *Kalevala* by Jean Sibelius

Kalevala: Dream of the Salmon Maiden, a CD of music and song (in Finnish and English) by Ruth Mackenzie

TWO IMPOSSIBLE MURDERS, A CREATURE THAT CAN'T EXIST AND THE FATE OF A COUNTRY HANGING BY A THREAD



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By Emma Bull

Finding your place in the past is a matter of skills, apprenticeship, and enthusiasm.

All right, you weekend time travelers. You've got a costume appropriate for the era of your choice, and you've found Renaissance Fairs, Society for Creative Anachronism tourneys, Regency balls, or Civil War encampments to attend. You're content … for a while.

But after a few events, you find you want more than walking the grounds, watching the demonstrations, sampling the food, and asking, "Who made your armor?" You're seized with a vague restlessness, an unfocused dissatisfaction. It's not enough. You're still on the outside looking in.

You want to be part of it.

Almost all the people you see on the other side of the railings, counters, ropes, or whatever barrier separates the participants from the visitors at an event have felt what you're feeling. They found a way to dive into history, to make it at least a serious hobby. For some of them, it's even their day job.

Before you resolve to run away and join the circus—and that's what being a reenactor is most like—you should remember that the job involves a lot of cleaning up after the elephants, and not nearly as much time spent in the center ring. And most historical events, even for-profit ones like the big annual Renaissance Festivals, operate largely on volunteer power. Most of the people who do get paid, aren't paid much.

Photo courtesy of Old Sturbridge Village/by Thomas Neill

If you are good at working with your hands, find a shoemaker to teach you his trade and you'll find your place in historical re-creation.

I haven't scared you off even a little, have I? Good.

There's a book called *What Color Is Your Parachute?* that's intended to guide the reader through the process of finding a career. (Trust me, I haven't fallen off the subject.) The book suggests a process of self-assessment, pointing out that before you ask yourself, "What should I do with my life?" you ought to first answer the questions, "What do I do well?" and "What do I like to do?"

You may be standing in the midst of your local Renaissance Fair, looking at the controlled chaos around you, thinking, "I want to be part of this—but how?" If you're very lucky, the answer springs to mind immediately. You juggle, or fence, or play the harp and sing, or do stage magic or tightrope-walking. You've seen people do those things at fairs, so you can do them, too.

But if you don't do any of those things, or any of the other tempting activities you've watched at history-themed venues, you may despair of finding your place in the past. Don't worry. You haven't seen half the things going on around you that make the event happen, and you have no idea how badly they need your help. Unfortunately, they don't, either … but you're going to fix that.

It's time for your self-assessment, with a historical slant. Grab a piece of paper or the keyboard and write down everything you can do, even if it seems silly or insignificant. Can you yodel? Cook? Carry heavy objects? Create Web pages? Use page design or accounting software? Fix cars? Count money? Weld? Take a pulse? Talk drunk people out of driving? Teach or explain things? Talk comfortably to strangers?

That was not a random list. All of the above skills have value to historical reenactors, or predispose you to learning skills that do. Don't censor yourself as you make your list; don't hesitate to write down

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ABOVE: Colonial Williamsburg's Fifes and Drums perform more than 350 times per year. Members of the group are talented musicians who combine a love of music with historic reenactment. RIGHT: Modern-day blacksmiths, wheelrights, and harnessmakers use 18th-century tools to create wheelbarrows, carts, barrels, and carriages for use in Colonial Williamsburg's Historic Area.

something because it seems silly or not relevant. If you know how to do it, or you're good at it, put it on the list.

Now take out another piece of paper and dream, big or little. What would you like to be able to do? What skills would you like to learn, what pastimes would you like to make your own? Blacksmithing, calligraphy, saddlemaking, cooking over a campfire, first aid, dancing, acting, shooting a muzzleloader, horseback riding?

Or how about public speaking, grant writing, promotions, event planning, catering? Your real-world skills are useful in your time-traveling life—and skills you develop while time-traveling can make your real-world résumé even more impressive.

Compare your two lists. What skills on the first list could help you accomplish the things on the second list? Those are the skills you can build on, the ones you "advertise" yourself with. If you don't see anything on that first list that seems useful, it probably means you didn't put everything on it. Did you leave off reading, researching, and Web-surfing skills? I'll bet you did. Being able to look things up is the fundamental skill for any weekend time-traveler.

You know what you can do, and what you want to do. How do you find out what needs doing?

Any historical re-creation event needs lots of people doing lots of jobs that visitors don't necessarily notice. Groups maintain mailing lists and Web sites. They do fundraising. Some groups need to book rehearsal or performance spaces. They need to recruit, organize, and schedule entertainment, demonstrations, and vendors. Large events need security, crowd control, and first aid facilities. Outdoor events need permits, and people who know where to go to get them. The site may need preparation; structures may need to be built or repaired, moved in or out. Next time you attend a fair or a reenactment, look around and imagine all the things that needed to be done to produce all the things you see—including the publicity that must have happened to get you and all the people around you to show up. Imagine the person-hours that must have gone into it, long before the event began. Now do you believe me when I say they need you?

While you're reading everything you can find in books or articles or online about the skills you want to acquire, try doing some interviews. These aren't job interviews—you're not selling your own talents yet. These are more like the interviews a journalist would do.

Say you want to get involved in Civil War reenactments. You've been to some encampments and battle re-creations, and you know who the groups are in your area that put them on. (If, in the process of asking questions, you forgot to ask, "Who are you guys, anyway?", you can track down a group by asking the folks at the place where the reenactment was held for the group's contact information.)

Call the contact person for the group and ask if you can buy him or her coffee and talk about what the group does. Explain that you're interested in getting involved, but want a better picture of what the group does, to see what you have to offer and how you could fit in.

People usually like to talk about their hobbies (in this case, more like obsessions). But because they're familiar with the mechanics of putting on an event, they might take for granted the things you most need to know. Be patient and ask for details. Where does the idea for an event come from? How does the preparation start? How does the group find a venue for it? Where do they find the resources—time, money, people, training, props, costumes? How do they advertise it? What are the biggest challenges in putting on an event? What's at the top of the group's resources wish list?

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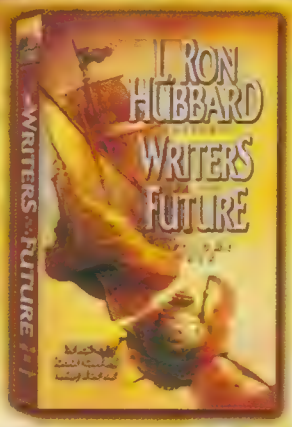

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Photo courtesy of Old Sturbridge Village/by Thomas Neill

If you love to cook and interact with people, your niche might be teaching Colonial cooking.

This same approach works for corporate-run things like big Renaissance Festivals and living history centers. You're more likely to meet the group's representative in an office than in a coffee shop, but your questions are pretty much the same. You want to know what this outfit needs and how you can supply it.

If you want to master a specific craft, the same process applies. Do plenty of reading and research beforehand—not to enable you to sound like an expert, but so you'll better understand the answers to any questions you ask. Then find people at events and in your area who do what you want to be able to do. Buy them the cup of coffee and start interviewing. When did you realize you wanted to do this? Where did you get your training? How did you start off on your own? What's your average day/week/year on the "job" like? What's the hardest part of what you do? What makes a good or bad blacksmith/costumer/stage magician/whatever the craft in question is?

A few interviews like that, and you'll begin to see where there might be a you-shaped hole in the historical re-creation of your choice. Now you know which of the skills on your first list to concentrate on when you volunteer, and which of the activities on the second list you'll have a chance to develop. And you'll see how other people got their start in whatever you want to do.

Be prepared to start at the bottom, of course. But the lowest rung of the historical re-creation ladder can be a lot of fun. Imagine apprenticing yourself to a chuck wagon cook, dressing in Old West gear, fetching ingredients and Dutch ovens from the chuck box, and making coffee over a fire. A far cry from "do you want fries with that?"! And yes, apprenticeship is a possibility. Learn as much as you can, ask lots of questions, then ask the craftsperson of your choice if you can help in return for learning the craft. Some of them will turn you down, but others are happy to teach, for a fee or for your help in the grungy work. Don't be discouraged by a few refusals.

Of course, there are plenty of groups and historical activities that don't call for half that much preparation to join. The Society for Creative Anachronism is a largely self-guided tour. Go to an event, volunteer, join the Society, and you're off, ready to start researching your persona and finding your specialty. Historic dance events require you to show up, learn the dances … and afterward go up to an organizer and say, "Can I help with the next dance event?"

But spending a little time evaluating your skills can still add to your enjoyment. I have a friend who was trained as a paramedic and planned a career in law enforcement. When he created his SCA character, he decided to be a Knight of St. John because it played to his strengths and interests, and gave him an excuse to use and expand on them on the weekends. Now he's fighting in tourneys and keeping the peace, and I'd be surprised if he hasn't honed skills on his weekend time travels that help with his day job, and vice versa.

I've been getting some great mail in response to this column, and I thought I'd share some of it with you. The article on etiquette for time travelers prompted Melissa Mead to write:

"A while back I went to a county fair. A stall in a largely ignored corner of a barn had been furnished like a Victorian sitting room, and a lady in period costume sat sedately by a machine with a sign 'What's This?' on it. I almost mistook her for a mannequin.

"'Not a camera,' I said, and she shook her head. 'I know! Magic lantern!'

"Her face lit up, and she nodded.

"Now, she looked so delighted, and it looked like she'd been sitting there all day

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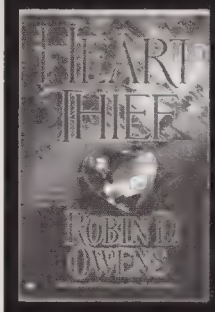

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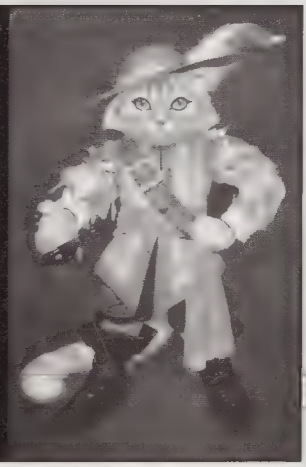

with hardly a glance, so I started pointing out other fascinating details of the 'set' to my family: 'That chair has no arms because it was designed for ladies in hoop skirts … ' until my family, half amused, half exasperated, hustled me away. The lady, still decorously silent, was grinning and looking like she was trying not to bust her stays laughing.

"Was I insufferably rude, or lightening that lady's otherwise boring day by appreciating her exhibit?"

Basic guideline: If they grin, you're safe. But readers, if you were in the Victorian lady's position, wouldn't you be interacting more with the visitors? The underlying notion of historical re-creation is "Don't wait for people to come to history—bring the history to them!"

Randy Behymer shares her memories of her first RenFair costume:

"We went to the thrift store and found an old woman's coat that was pure 70s—a rust-colored woven material, very fitted through the bodice and about a size too small … We cut off the arms and collar, and left a small amount of fabric over the waist which was turned and hemmed. Now, for the tricky part: my friend used TV antenna wire to reinforce the area for the grommets in front of the bodice. She also inserted some strips of heavy plastic to act as stays. Once lacing was inserted, I had a nearly skin-tight bodice that allowed for ample cleavage. And we all know how popular cleavage is at the RenFair!

"I had a peasant-type blouse for under the bodice. and we found an old brown cotton bedspread that she quickly cobbled into a skirt. A hat, a basket, a belt, hanging purse and mug for ale, and a pair of Birkenstocks, and voila! …It is *definitely* better to attend these events in costume. I had a blast!"

Randy recommends Birkenstocks for Renaissance footwear. Good idea; they're comparatively expensive, but they're durable, peasanty-looking, and comfortable for a day on your feet on all sorts of terrain.

Trish Graboske wrote to remind me of a great mail-order costuming source:

"I realized that I have been buying this kind of clothing from a wonderful catalog … It is called Deva Lifewear (*www.deva lifewear.com*). Deva sells 'unisex shirts' that would be perfect for medieval and Renaissance men's clothes, vests, and the 'ankle-length gathered skirt in a nonformal fabric' that she mentions is hard to find."

Thank you, Trish! I'd forgotten the Deva people. They're also a great source of drawstring cotton pants for you peasant guys, and have several cotton shirts in various weights that would be wonderful for cowboy or pioneer costumes. Their sizes are generous, too.

(If you'd like to pass along your own costuming ideas, or alert me to historical re-creation events around the country that *Realms of Fantasy* readers would enjoy, please send mail or e-mail to me, care of the magazine: *Realms of Fantasy,* 441 Carlisle Dr., Herndon, VA 20170; lcleveland@sovhomestead.com) ❧

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By Gahan Wilson

Night Shade Books presents the classics of fantasy—past, present, and future.

The other day the little local country bus I was riding through a woodsy landscape halted at an entirely unexceptional crossroads and took on a thin young man with very pale skin and pitch-black hair that perfectly matched his perfectly ironed white shirt, neat black suit, and shiny black hiking shoes.

As he sat down not far from me I saw that he carried a small, flat plastic case, also black, which I correctly understood to be a laptop computer and that he had tiny black devices attached to his ears and clipped to his clothing which I knew had to be the latest thing in a compact, hands-off cell phone. The whole effect was very *Matrix*.

Illustration by Caniglia, www.caniglia-art.com

Tom Piccirilli's A Choir of Ill Children *takes place in Kingdom Come, a tiny town filled with bizarre inhabitants.*

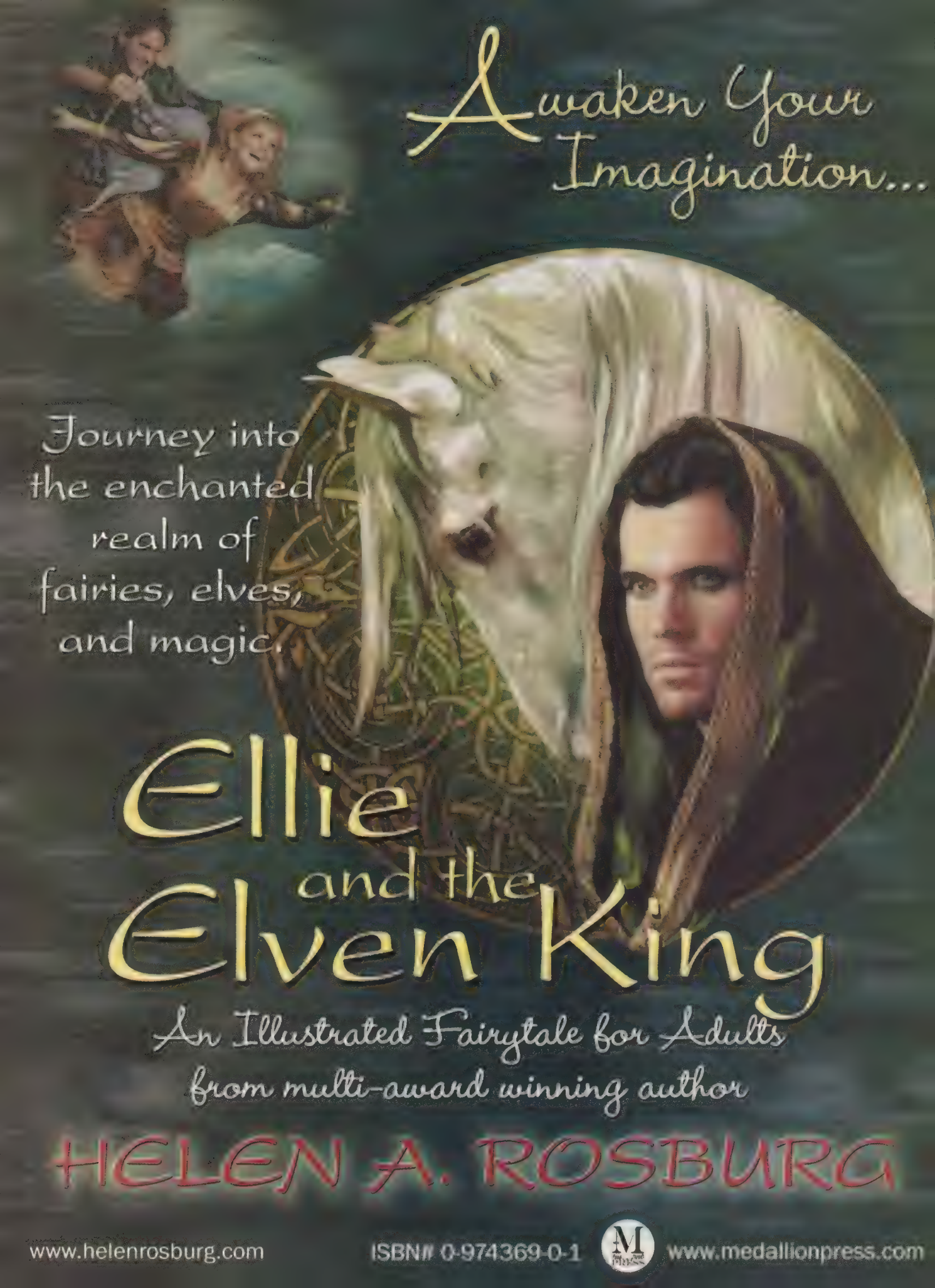
As soon as he was settled he activated both these devices and then spent his whole ride quietly chatting and typing, entirely oblivious to every tree and crooked fence and rolling field we passed. I knew that the future H.G.Wells, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell had predicted had visibly moved a notch or two closer without the slightest possibility of retreat.

In another mood I might have shuddered and made a sad face and perhaps even brooded for a bit, but that morning I had received a package from Night Shade Books that was a follow-up to prior packages. So I gazed at the young man almost affectionately, for I knew that without him and the technology he represented we wouldn't have a chance of enjoying the marvelous flood of truly wonderful books small presses can now produce.

Back when I'd first stumbled across fantasy fiction and was greedily reading everything I could get my hands on there wasn't that much I could get my hands on. Many of the classics were long out of print and had become rare collectors' items totally beyond my budget. The new fantasy writers were hardly ever reprinted in books, so you had to save stacks of fragile magazines or track down old ones in weird, seedy stores if you wanted to have them on hand.

There were just a few small presses in the field and they had a great struggle because every step in the process of turning out a book back then involved enormous amounts of work, rooms of heavy equipment, and huge problems in storage and distribution.

Hardly any of the presses managed to produce more than a few books, and those that somehow managed to survive did so only through enormous, if not downright heroic, struggle. Now, thanks to the magical gadgetry such as the man on the bus was building his life around, every aspect of the whole process has been simplified and made more flexible. Risks that once would have been suicidal can now be reasonably taken, and problems of marketing that were once nearly insurmountable are now tolerably manageable.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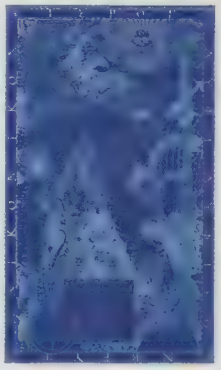
So hurrah for the gadgeted man in black for all his ominous overtones, says I, perhaps selfishly.

One of the best of the small presses now operating is the above-mentioned Night Shade Books which, speaking of new technologies, has their complete shopping list ready and waiting for you at *www. nightshadebooks.com.* They were astute enough (or maybe they are shamans who have not altogether abandoned old technologies such as reading signs on charred bones) to lead off by sending me a clump of collections of the works of Manly Wade Wellman, who is one of my very favorite authors and was a cherished friend.



There were no less than five volumes. and they came with the announcement that this is only the first half of a projected series of ten. These first five are ***The Third Cry to Legba and Other Invocations, The Devil Is Not Mocked and Other Warnings, Fearful Rock and Other Precarious Locales, Sin's Doorway and Other Ominous Entrances,*** and ***Owls Hoot in the Daytime and Other Omens.***

It's no exaggeration at all to say I was delighted to see them all as Wellman has not had the sort of posthumous luck he's deserved so far as publishing is concerned. It's nice to know these books will serve to introduce him to many new readers and, hopefully, they may kick off a general rediscovery.

I certainly hope so because Wellman's stories are not only first-rate fantasies and marvelously entertaining, they have a truly unique warmth to them—they're very human—maybe because they are often based on naturally grown folk imaginings. They also own an amazing believability since Manly really knew how to tell a whopper.

And they're genuinely scary. I remember a marvelous moment—when we held the first World Fantasy Convention in Lovecraft's Providence—that took place during a Q&A with a panel of excellent writers of horrific tales. A member of the audience looked the whole bunch in the eye and asked, "Why do you people write about such awful things?"

There was a noticeable pause and then, one by one, the various authors made funny little jokes and it became increasingly obvious none of them wanted to meet the dangerous question head on until it got to Manly, who leaned forward to regard the questioner with an unabashed and steady gaze.

"When I was a boy," he said, "we'd go hunting in the woods at night. We'd sit around the fire listening to the hounds as they circled out there in the dark, muttering amongst

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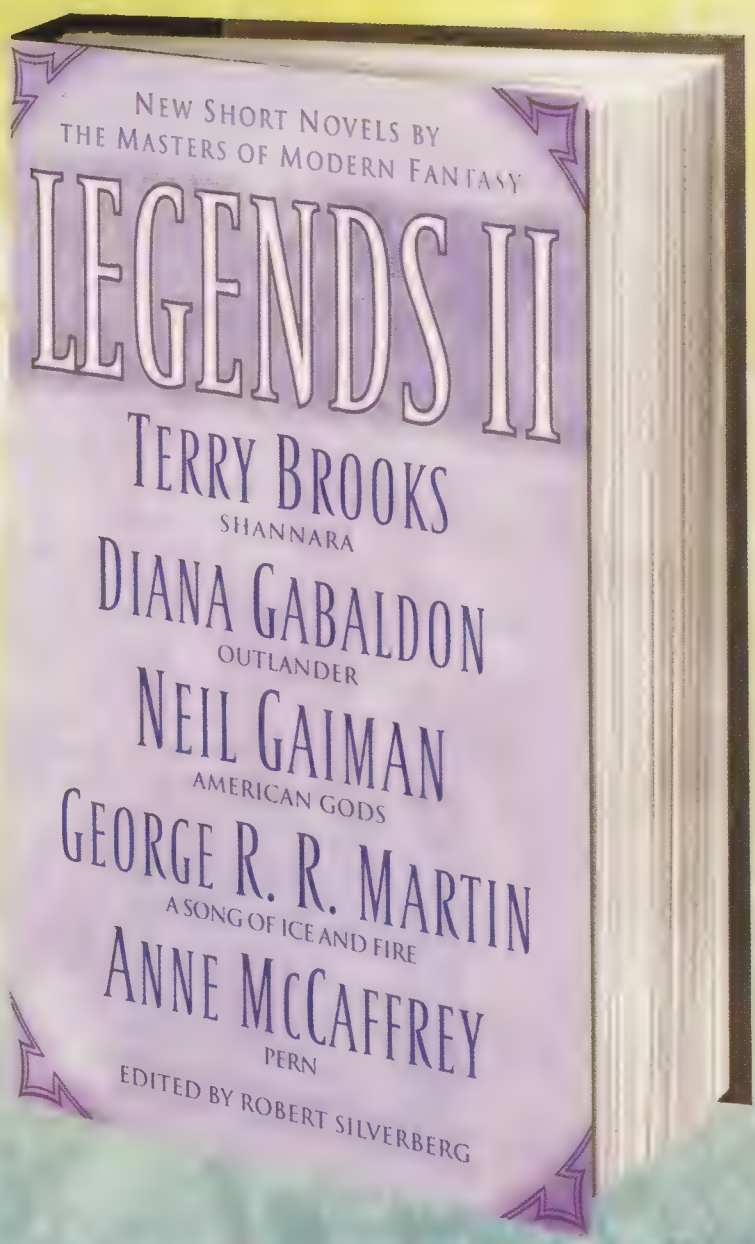

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themselves, and we'd tell each other stories. When it came my turn I always told them really scary stories because it made their eyes bug."

Then he paused.

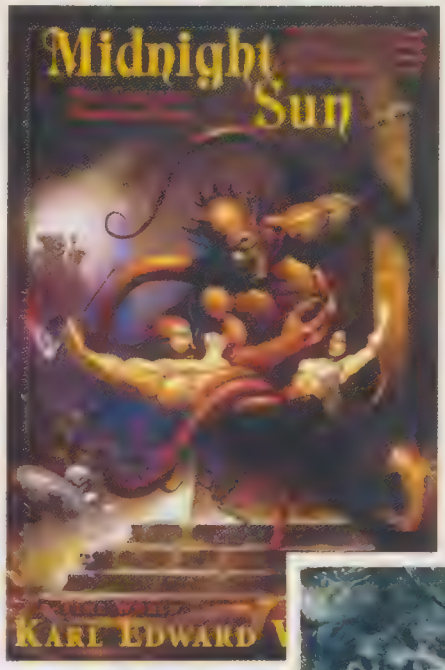
"I liked that," he said. And then he paused again, letting them chuckle nervously just the perfect length of time, and said, "I still like that!"

I hope, with the aid of these volumes, you get to know him.

The Boats of the "Glen Carrig" and other Nautical Adventures by William Hope Hodgson is Night Shade Books' first volume in *The Collected Fiction of William Hope Hodgson* and I can't imagine any serious collector of fantasy not wanting to grab it up.

Hodgson is one of the truly great creators of fantastic fiction and a huge amount of what came after him in the field would never have been had he not clearly shown the way. *The House on the Borderland* and *The Night Land: A Love Tale*, two interconnected novels, are probably his most famous works and will of course appear in future books, but this present volume does a lovely job of gathering together all of the sea stories inspired by the author's personal experiences as a sailor. It is a fitting and proper start for the series for, as its editor, Jeremy Lassen, says, "It is his narratives of the sea that first captured the attention of the reading public. More importantly, however, it was in that weed-choked Sargasso Sea where Hodgson first began to explore unreality, and the borderlands of human existence."

Another, more recent rescue by Night Shade Books of a body of fantasy fiction that has slipped into nearly complete unavailability is ***Midnight Sun,*** which is a gathering together of all of Karl Wagner's short stories and poems concerning Kane, the wandering immortal. These stories succeeded delightfully in putting a subtle new spin on heroic barbarians that is not to be missed.



Kane is clearly inspired by the work of Fritz Leiber's gigantic Fafhrd and Robert E. Howard's Conan (and I would not be at all surprised to learn that the notion of having a hero named Kane turn out to be the fellow mentioned earlier on in the Bible did not also spring from that latter source), but Wagner's character very much became his own man and his adventures have a flavor and quality that is entirely unique. Believe me, these rip- roarers go off in a direction that is altogether their own. You'll read nothing quite like them anywhere else and I agree entirely with Stephen Jones's compassionate introduction's assertion that Kane was decidedly Wagner's best work.

Speaking of that introduction, it's not to be skipped, for it's not only highly perceptive but full of information that was new to me and may be new to you. I'd no idea, for instance, that the first Kane novel was initially published by a porn merchant who had the written descriptions of its lead character distorted so that he might more closely resemble the naughty painting of Kane that appeared on the cover of the book. Nor was I aware of the long and tedious struggle Wagner went through trying to get Kane to really catch on before a decidedly classier editor at Warner commissioned the redoubtable Frank Frazetta to start doing covers for the series in hopes the magic that highly talented artist had worked for Howard's Conan paperbacks might also put a rocket onto Wagner's continuing opus and—hey, presto!—it did.

So here's your chance to buy this book of truly rousing fables and to cozy up by the fire with or without lashings of mead and have a fine time for yourself. I suggest you grab it.

And now I'd like to wrap up this column up by assuring you that Night Shade Books is by no means limited to locating hard-to-find works of yore and intelligently presenting them to fortunate readers of fantasy—

Ah! But one last announcement as to that: Be happily warned that they have in the works a two-volume edition of all the Jorkens stories Lord Dunsany ever wrote! Do I hear cheers? Yes, I think I certainly hear cheers!

—they are also bringing out some extraordinarily good contemporary fiction never before before printed, bless their hearts.

One excellent example is ***A Choir of Ill Children*** by Tom Piccirilli, which is a real dazzler, a totally unabashed fantastic novel taking place within a kind of William Faulknierian universe in the tiny town of Kingdom Come located in Pott's County.

The droll narrator of the tale is Thomas who is, now that his father's thrown himself into the grinding gears of the mill works and his mother's disappeared entirely, the richest man in the area, yearningly eyed by all the impoverished young ladies and plotted against by their mothers.

Thomas lives in the huge, old family mansion with his three brothers, Jonah, Coke, and Sebastian, who are unfortunate to be joined at one enormous head containing a 10-pound brain and he suspects he can just make out the face of a sister buried into their side.

Although this little family sounds a tad bizarre, the reader will find it is not alone in its oddness, for Kingdom Come is generously packed with interestingly odd citizens, many of whom are deeply engaged in widely diverse religious pursuits ranging from conjure ladies engaged in the manufacture of varied strange nostrums to members of the Holy Order of the Flying Walendas (they like the metaphor of walking the high wire through life) who wear cowled robes with thistles and barbs and only speak between sixth and seventh hour.

Interested in learning more ? I should think so!

And just to make sure you understand that the folks at Night Shade Books are serious about this contemporary business, they have just come out with ***Veniss Underground,*** a new novel from Jeff Vandermeer and it fully lives up to all expectations encouraged by his *City of Saints and Madmen,* previously and very positively reviewed here.

Although both *Veniss* and *Saints* are just as much about their environments as their characters, it seems to me that *Veniss* is more directly a science fiction novel (although it's important to read the author's afterword regarding this point). Even though it's set in grim times with grim people and has many interesting and rather dire notions concerning the potentially dangerous effect new technologies may have when artists start using them to doodle with living tissue, it successfully reaches above the dystopic implications and ends up being quietly

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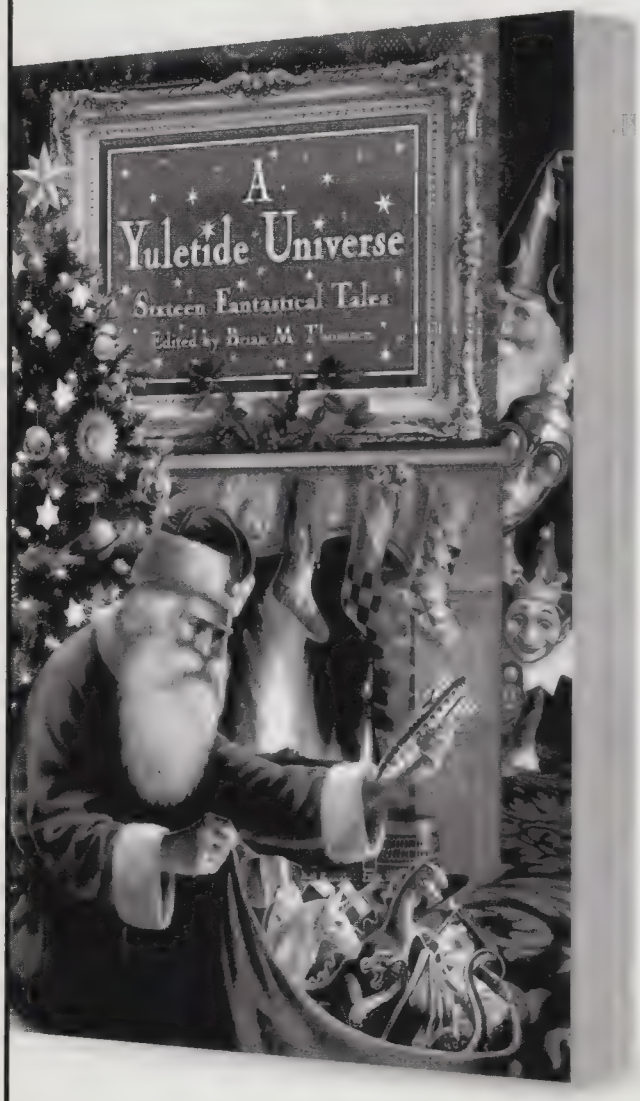

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I intend to read it again and hope you will read it at least once.

Gahan Wilson

Fudoki, Kij Johnson, Tor, New York, hardcover, 320 pp., $24.95, ISBN: 0-765-30390-6.

One of the pleasures of book reviewing is that one's preconceptions—prejudices, if you will—are occasionally confounded. Novels about cats, for example. Hate 'em. (Even worse is that despicable genre of books ostensibly written by or with feline authors like the prolific Sneaky Pie Brown.) And don't get me started on furry fiction wherein cats transform into people and vice versa. It's not that I'm unappreciative of the charms of cats; indeed, I share an apartment with one. But while I can admire the grace and grin at the antics of flesh-and-blood kitties, on the page they are—excepting the Cheshire Cat—too often portrayed as preternaturally noble, wise, brave, and cute, a combination of qualities that has a hairball-like effect on my literary sensibilities.

An ominous tickling commenced in my throat as I read the cover copy of Kij Johnson's *Fudoki*: "And so a small cat begins an extraordinary journey …" But I was soon seduced by this elegantly written, artfully conceived novel. It is the second in Johnson's Heian trilogy, set in Japan during the medieval Heian period (794-1192), a time of peace, prosperity, and cultural flowering … though one would not necessarily grasp this from *Fudoki*, with its unflinching descriptions of violence, war, and revenge, and its thoughtful presentation of the personal and cultural consequences thereof. I have not read the first novel in the trilogy, *The Fox Woman* (based on Johnson's Sturgeon award-winning short-story, "Fox Magic"), but I will seek it out now, and while *Fudoki* works splendidly as a stand-alone, I advise potential readers to do the same; if the first is even half as good as the second, you'll be glad you did.

Fudoki tells two related tales, one nestled inside the other … or so it seems. The first is an impressionistic autobiography of our narrator, Princess Harueme. Harueme, a spirited old woman dying of cancer, writes down her memories and reflections prior to leaving the palace where she has spent most of her adult life for the nunnery where she is to pass her final days. Impelled by an obscure desire, she begins to record the fictional story of a young female tortoiseshell cat.

Harueme writes that cat society and individual identity are governed by the concept of *fudoki*: "self and soul and home and shrine, all in one to a cat"—or to female cats, for cat society is matriarchal. When the tortoiseshell cat's family, and *fudoki*, are destroyed in a fire, the young cat—who, like all her kind, can see and speak with supernatural entities such as ghosts and the Shinto deities called *kami*—wanders aimlessly, rootlessly, until an encounter with the *kami* of a

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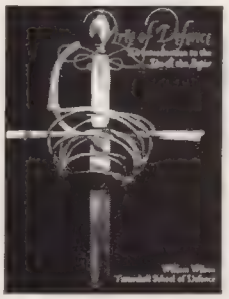

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road results in her transformation into a human being, a warrior woman known as Kagaya-hime. Kagaya-hime retains many feline attributes: she can see in the dark, move quickly and silently, and so on. The *kami* also gives her weapons, a horse, and servants. Whether this transformation is curse or blessing depends on one's point of view. To Kagaya-hime, it is unquestionably the former, but though her desire to return to her true nature is unwavering, the *kami* does not comply. There is nothing she can do but continue traveling along the road that is in some way a physical manifestation of the god. Like Dorothy following the Yellow Brick Road, Kagaya-hime gains companions on her journey and becomes involved in a bloody, revenge-driven conflict.

Harueme relates Kagaya-hime's adventures with wit and insight, qualities also present in her autobiographical digressions, which gradually coalesce into an affecting portrait of a life circumscribed by courtly ritual and bureaucracy, placid and peaceful on the surface but running deep with turbulent emotions: love for her attendant, Shigeko; for her half-brother, Shirakawa, the emperor; and for a long-ago lover, Domei, who may have betrayed the emperor. Johnson's interweaving of these two *fudokis* suggests connections between them, and between fiction and reality, that reminded me of *The Decay of the Angel*, the final volume in Yukio Mishima's *Sea of Fertility* tetralogy. Indeed, *Fudoki* is as much—or as little—a fantasy as that mind-blowing novel; it is one of those rare books that demonstrates the irrelevance of such distinctions.

Tooth and Claw, Jo Walton, Tor, NY, hardcover, 256 pp., $24.95, ISBN: 0-765-30264-0.

I don't usually like books about dragons, either. And for the same reasons. How did dragons turn into big, scaly cats with wings? Part of the blame lies with Anne McCaffrey, who is to dragons what Tolkien is to elves, but as with Tolkien, it is McCaffrey's many imitators (including, by now, McCaffrey herself) who are really responsible for this sad emasculation. *Tooth and Claw*, Jo Walton's latest novel, is at once a droll satire on this trend and a delightful homage to the 19th-century novel of manners. An author's note acknowledges a debt to Trollope's *Framley Parsonage*, and much of Walton's plot and characters do derive from that novel. But the familiar, chatty, and beneficently witty omniscience of the narrator, and her (or his) gossipy zest in relating family connections, scandals, etc., put me more in mind of Jane Austen. In his *Lectures on Literature*, Nabokov rather condescendingly referred to Austen's "delicate patterns … her collection of eggshells in cotton wool." I feel confident he did not have dragons' eggs in mind!

The novel begins with the death of Dignified Bon Agornin, an elderly, 70-foot-long dragon. Bon is expiring upon his hoard,

attended by his son Penn, a parson, whom he scandalizes by asking for confession. Penn's affronted response: "Not for three thousand years, six lifetimes of dragons, has confession been a sacrament. It reeks of the Time of Subjugation and the heathen ways of the Yarge."

It is refreshing to encounter such economical world-building. In two sentences, Walton tells us more than some writers impart in pages. The backstory unfolds bit by bit so that it harmonizes with and gently advances, rather than overwhelms, the plot.

That plot involves the terms of Bon Agornin's will governing the distribution of his estate. In Walton's world, a dragon's estate is not merely his material possessions and the gold of his hoard. Her dragons can grow bigger and stronger only by consuming the flesh of other dragons. In the barbaric past, strong dragons preyed upon weak, but in these "civilized" times, cannibalism is regulated by law. Thus, dragons belonging to the aristocracy are responsible for culling the weak stock of tenants and servants, judgments rendered at law may include the ultimate sanction, and a dying dragon bequeaths his flesh to his heirs.

When Bon's son-in-law, the Illustrious Daverak, takes more of the paternal corpse than seems his rightful due, Bon's youngest son, Avan, brings suit against him. Legal and romantic complications ensue as Bon's children, including two marriageable daughters, navigate a perilous path through a Victorian society that, for all its ostensible refinement, is as Darwinian as Walton's title implies. As with Austen and Trollope, the end is never in doubt, but the fun lies in getting there. One assumes this is the start of a series; if so, it is an auspicious beginning.

Mortal Suns, Tanith Lee, The Overlook Press, New York, hardcover, 336 pp., $26.95, ISBN: 1-58567-207-6.

Now a novel featuring neither cats nor dragons. For that alone, I am grateful to Tanith Lee.

I think of Lee as a poet who happens to write fiction. Her flawless sentences sometimes forsake sense for sensuality. Her imagery is stunning, often shocking, and her plots advance less by cause and effect than by associational leaps of symbol and metaphor. A Wildean decadence—the Wilde of *Salomé*, that is—pervades (if not drenches) her fictions. If her exoticism has cost her more widespread success, it has won her a devoted following.

Like *Fudoki*, Lee's novel is narrated by an old woman at the end of her life. A famed poetess and seer, Sirai speaks from "the Empire-Continent of Pesh Sandu," relating the blood-drenched events of her youth in the far-off country of Akhemony. There she had a different name—two different names, in fact, one of which, Cemira, meaning "serpent," was bestowed at birth by her mother, a Daystar, or consort, of the King, understandably distraught to find her newborn daughter lacking feet. Despite this crippling deformity, Sirai grows into a beautiful, if somewhat passive, young woman and wins the love of her half-brother, Klyton, the son of the King by another consort. Klyton believes that he has been chosen for greatness by the gods … and he is half-right. The romance of Klyton and Sirai, and his stormy pursuit of his promised destiny, set up a tragedy of mythic proportions.

Lee's depiction of Akhemonian culture, which in certain aspects resembles pre-Socratic Greece, is a remarkable achievement. Her lush, violent imagery is perfectly suited to the land, its people, and their cruelly capricious gods. Sirai says at one point that she is writing a "book of shade and sorrows," but shade requires sun, and Akhemony is ablaze with it; the planet seems to orbit a binary star system. The Sun is the chief god; the King a divine incarnation of solar power. Lee creates a culture so bright that it is blinding, one far stranger than its Grecian echoes induce us at first to expect … so strange, in fact, that its underlying psychology seems to translate but imperfectly into English. An irreducible alienness hovers behind words, motivations, events, and it seems to me that, far from a flaw, this is exactly right. As with many myths, much in *Mortal Suns* remains mysterious, but the novel only gains in power thereby. ❧

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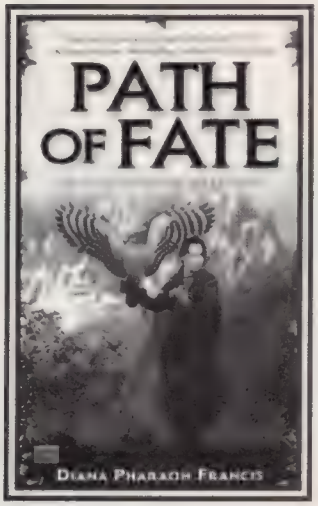

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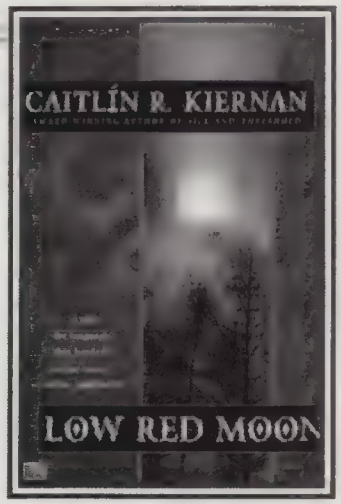

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THE ONE WHO

Before you start a war, it's always a good idea to know what and (especially) who you're fighting for.

ONE

Once upon a time, some trolls lived deep inside the darkness of their caves. To feed themselves they crawled across the underground pools and streams, groping in the blackness for fish. When fish were scarce, the trolls clawed crumbs of glowing fungus from the cave walls or snatched spiders from their webs. They knew nothing of day or night, but when they were tired they pillowed their heads on stones and shivered themselves to sleep.

A voice came to the trolls in their dreams. "You are wretched creatures who do not even know your wretchedness. See now how other beings live." In their dreams, the trolls saw another world, a world of light much brighter than the glow of fungus. In this world lived creatures that, like trolls, walked upon two feet, but their ways were not at all the ways of trolls. They kept animals in pens,

THE ONE WHO CONQUERS

BY BRUCE HOLLAND ROGERS ILLUSTRATION BY LAURIE HARDEN

which made them easy to kill and eat. They made food grow up out of the ground in great abundance. When they were tired, they lay down in softness and warmth.

"What is this?" the trolls wondered in their sleep.

"This is the world of humans. The place you see is a town. The life you live now is hard and cold. I can give you this life that is soft and warm. Your bellies are empty. I can make them always full."

"Who are you?"

"I am The One Who Conquers. Accept me as your god, and we will take by force the life that I have shown you." Then he told them his secret name.

When the trolls awoke, they knew that they were wretched. They knew that they wanted to sleep in warmth and softness and to fill their bellies whenever they liked.

So they built a mound of stones as a temple to The One Who Conquers, and they prayed to the god by his secret name.

Every night, The One Who Conquers came to them in dreams and showed them what they must do. They must leave their cave and enter the brightness. They must go a long way through a place where fungus grew hard and tall and across another place where fungus grew thin and no higher than a troll's knees. "Forest," said the voice in their dreams. "Field." They must find the town of the other two-legged beings, kill them, and take over their lives.

"In the upper realm where it is all one great cavern, how will we find the town?"

"Say my secret name, and you will find it."

"How will we bear such brightness?" wondered the trolls.

"Say my secret name," the god told them, "and you will bear it."

"The creatures you show us are small, but you have shown us that they are good at killing. How will we defeat them?"

"Say my secret name, and I will protect you," said the voice in their dreams.

Awake, the trolls quarreled among themselves. They fought one another over fish, then complained that the fish were small. They groaned when they lay down on the hard cave floor to sleep.

"You are ready," said The One Who Conquers in their dreams. "It is time."

The trolls crept up from the depths of their cave. When they first emerged in the brightness, it wasn't so bright as they had feared. The roof of the one great cavern glittered with tiny lights.

"Where is the town?" they asked one another. "Which way do we go?" They milled about near the mouth of the cave until one of them remembered to call upon the god by his secret name.

"Follow my sign," said a voice. In one direction, they saw a green glow in the sky. They followed the glow into the place of trees.

As they made their way, the light began to change. A greater brightness overwhelmed the tiny lights. The sky grew fierce, brighter and brighter, stabbing their eyes. The trolls put their hands over their faces and wept until they remembered to call their god by his secret name. For a moment, green light glowed in their eyes.

"Open wide your eyes," said a voice. "Look about in the light of day."

The trolls looked about. They could see without pain, even where a brilliant light shone through to the forest floor. They continued through the forest and out of the forest across the grassy plain, all the while following the green glow that shone even in the daylight.

They followed the glow to the first farms around the town. There, the trolls began to conquer, surprising men in their fields and women at their cook fires. The trolls conquered young and old. With their bare hands, they conquered cattle. They ate whatever they defeated. As night fell, the trolls crawled into feather beds or piles of straw. They slept in warmth and softness for the first time, bellies full.

"There is more, much more," promised The One Who Conquers. The trolls dreamed of full larders and even softer beds in the town.

In the morning, the trolls approaching the town heard the sound of a trumpet, which they had never heard before. They saw swords and bows and arrows, which they had seen only in dreams. A few arrows jumped into the sky, and one struck a troll. He howled and fell down, dying.

The trolls stopped. They fell back. More arrows flew.

Only then did the trolls remember to call upon The One Who Conquers. They said his secret name.

The green glow began to shine all over the bodies of the trolls. "At this hour, take this, my blessing," said a voice. "Go forward, quickly, without fear."

Just then an arrow struck a troll in the head, but it fell away as if it had struck a stone. A second arrow shattered against the shoulder of another troll. The One Who Conquers urged them on, and the trolls overran the town. In their eagerness, they knocked down walls, tore doors from their hinges, smashed barrels. They snapped the swords of the townsfolk with their hands. A few of the four-legged animals escaped from broken pens, but every one of the human beings was found and conquered before the glow had faded.

For many nights thereafter, the trolls feasted as they had feasted on the farms. Bellies full, they dozed through the days. In their dreams, they saw the town as it would be, with animals in their pens awaiting slaughter. Farmers plowed the fields and raised up grain. Blacksmiths repaired the broken swords and beat the crumpled trumpet round again. The town would be as it had been, but its people would be trolls. In dreams, the trolls learned to keep the fruits of conquest.

And so they did. The trolls lived the lives of the beings they had vanquished. They rounded up the cattle that had escaped. They rebuilt the walls, rehung the doors. They repaired the well in the town square and made the town their own.

The trolls did not forget The One Who Conquers. They tore down the town's old holy building and built a temple to their god in its place. They praised him above all other gods. They were rich, and on holy nights they gave over a portion of their riches as sacrifice to him and him alone.

THE GREEN GLOW BEGAN TO SHINE ALL OVER THE BODIES OF THE TROLLS.

They no longer heard the voice of their god in their dreams. They no longer dreamed together, never awoke from a single vision that all had shared. Even so, the trolls remembered him and honored him, their divine patron.

The trolls grew ever more comfortable, and stayed that way until the night when something half like a fish and half like a man heaved itself over the lip of the well and staggered across the square. It overturned a cart and tried to bite a troll who killed it with a sword. Then another such monster crawled out of the well. This one glowed green and the trolls broke their swords against it. When the trolls tried to shoot it, their arrows shattered and fell harmless on the cobblestones. More monsters crawled one after the other from the well. They, too, glowed green.

Trolls fought. Trolls died.

As they tried to save themselves, the trolls called out to their god. They said, "Help us!"

No voice answered them.

The monsters smashed walls. They reached their glowing arms into cellars where trolls were hiding.

Calling their god by his secret name, trolls said, "Help us! Why won't you help us?"

At last a voice answered them. It said, "I am The One Who Conquers." ❧

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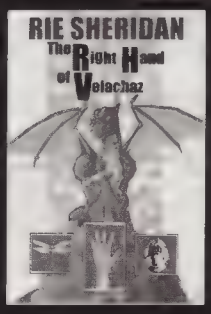

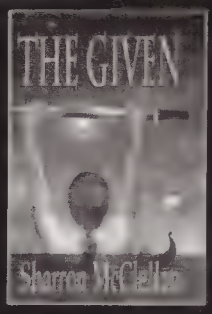

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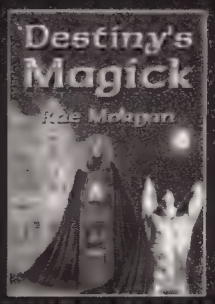

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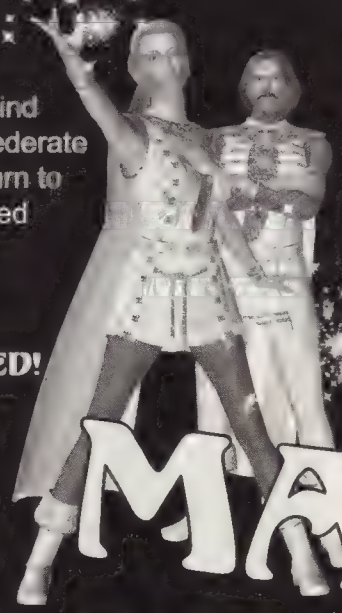

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GOT MAGIC?

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STILL MAN

BY WILLIAM R. EAKIN • ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN HORTON

Dark secrets lurk in the heart of the wood, but be sure not to mistake the merely wild for the truly evil.

See that little robot over there, the one made of pieces of still, whirring and clinking? He has a message for you. Go ahead: reach out, take it. It is in a child's hand, a picture of the moon. Perhaps you have heard the story of the rustic men of Wiltshire, caught trying to rake the moon's reflection from a pond, thinking it cheese. Most of us in Redgunk, Mississippi, think they feigned simple-mindedness only for the revenuers, that really they were raking out barrels of moonshine. True enough, but know this: sleep in the moonlight and you will go mad. Moonshiners drink in the mead of a little girl's best friend, and they touch the root of madness and measurement, of mind and men.

The painted sign read "Prosecutors Will Be Violated" and, old joke or not, no local law officer, judge, mayor, sheriff, attorney, or city cop had any doubts there was truth to *Deliverance*, which used to play Friday-midnight shows at the old Felpham Twin Drive-In and nowadays is the most popular rental at Mabel Delashmit's Video and Pizzeria, over on County Road 63. You had to take an army-green flat-bottom fishing boat, about the only vessel that would make it, up the sludgy waters of the Big Piney, way up past where civilization could even be pronounced, in order even to see the sign, and the sign was just the beginning of it, socially and geographically speaking. If you got that far, you knew you had to work through ticks, spiders, snakes, boulders, caves, VC-inspired bamboo-speared booby traps, gun outposts, mass-murdering hill women with big knives, and always nasty rain forest-humid, man-eating-plant back-country climate, in order to find him at all. The real import of it wasn't worrying about things like "What is that hanging from those posts in the middle of the stream, all round and in pairs like that and looking like something that might have once been attached to a human male?" but more like "If we did get up there to him and we did arrest him and we did finally send him to jail or wherever else we could transport his sorry-butt carcass, would we ever again be able to hold elected office this side of the Mississippi?" Because, you see, he was the proud supplier of 99 percent of the liquor sold in Blake County, and ten other counties besides; he'd made all the local moonshine for about twenty years and had established a name for himself selling it on the Internet, too. Johann Kurtz, also known as Still Man, was voted the Most Valuable Member of Society down in Newman County in 1978, even though, much to the relief of the citizens, he did not show up to receive the accolade.

STILL MAN—EX-MARINE, EX-CON, KNOWN TO HAVE EATEN A HUMAN HEART, MAN OF GENIUS—WROTE A NOW-FAMOUS THESIS ON "EXPLORATION OF THE POSSIBILITIES OF Perpetual Motion in Moonshine Production Equipment" and another called "Overcoming Newtonian Presuppositions in the Chemistry of Homemade Intoxicating Liquors, with Implications for the Possibilities of Artificial Intelligence." When you saw what was hanging from the lintel of the front door of his rundown little shotgun plank house—something uncannily similar to what was hanging on those posts out in the river, only these tagged with "Personal Property of Revenuers"—why you would never even think this man capable of something besides murder and mayhem.

Indeed, you would never think of Still Man as being something sweet or tender: a single parent, for example, a dad, a real man with a daughter. But if you could have watched him from the stilled leaves of the dark night forest, you would see it. Still Man some nights sat very still with that little girl nestled into him, reading in a low voice the musical words and lightning-strike sense of *One Fish, Two Fish* and *Go, Dog, Go.* Unless sometimes you could sneak past those Still-bots of his, like an opossum or a lizard, and look up over the plank porch into the rooms themselves of what you called the Big House, you would never imagine one of the rooms of that outlaw shack to be possessed of primitive sketches in a girl's hand, horses running free in wild winds, moon-dreams of castles escalating up into various and wondrous eternities. Unless you heard his voice with your ears and skin, and with your own fleshy animal heart, you might not ever know that not only did he tolerate these drawings, but he encouraged them with a big, manly, gentle hand. In fact, sometimes he drew them, too.

He built all those Still-bots for her, the ones made of old still pieces, wiring, tubing, chunks of metal, walking around outside the house, tilting and whirring and whirling and serving his gin and vodka tonics, and playing ball. They were her best friends, or *be* was through them, because the little girl plainly saw his gentle hand in all of them, in their wiring and in their sometimes voiceless, sometimes voiced personalities, and you could have seen his imprint there, too, even if you were some wild deer woman who did not speak much English and who was afraid to show herself in any house, much less this one, some animal-woman lurking in the shadows to watch. The girl loved her daddy, and she loved those Still-bots because of him, and at night she was in the bosom of all happiness because of that low, masculine Dr. Seuss reading voice that sometimes even sang, "Edelweiss, Edelweiss...." And if you had lived out in the woods thereabouts, being like some animal or even plant in your mental capacities and in every motion, like some stalk of kudzu listening to that voice, you, too, would feel you were nestled in his bosom.

There was no mother there in the house on top of that grassy knoll he called Bear Ear Mountain (elevation 10 feet). Mad Andrea, the one with the knife you can sometimes see gleaming in the moist, succulent forest along the river, was mother, but she was too much like a wild deer to be brought into the house, and when he lay with her, he had to go out into the thicket. That did not mean their joining was not wild, still, calm, wonderful, full of the shining moon. It just meant she was crazy.

The only other person to have any direct commerce with Still Man was Jeb Redon, sixty-six cranky, who worked Tuesdays and Thursdays picking up road kill for the county, and Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays running the squeeze and generally avoiding the law for purposes he and Still Man alone could know. Jeb came up the river in one of those green fishing boats, only half-afraid of losing any private parts himself, and always left at night with the boat weighted down in moonshine, real and figurative, with a supply list in his hands and relief on his brow. If you were a mad woman in the woods, you would not like the way Jeb Redon smelled of diesel and bad dirt, and you would never show yourself, and he would never know you existed, maybe no one would, except the little girl, perhaps, and the man who came out some sultry green nights to share your animal nature.

Anyway, knowing all that, I think you are in a position to conjecture and foreknow, probably, some of the tragic possibilities and feelings of fated unfairness and guilt, rage, and King Lear elemental dread that could have risen up over the wet atmosphere of the Bear Ear Mountain house when Still Man got word from Jeb Redon that there would soon be someone coming up the river, a *woman* appointed by the courts to do so, with a degree in social work.

SHE MISSED THE SIGN ALTOGETHER AND SHERIFF DAN POTTER HAD TO NUDGE HER THERE IN HIS RUSTY GREEN TROUT BOAT AND SAY, "WE'RE HERE, YOUNG MISS SOCIAL WORKER."

And she said, "Pardon?" which meant she'd been listening to the nice birds singing in that moist, succulent, and pretty forest.

He said, "Look, lady, I can't go no further than this. I—" His eyes rolled with the fear.

"What's there to be afraid of, Sheriff?" Young girl, too young, fresh from the master's degree, maybe her first real assignment. Baptism by fire, taking a child away from her daddy—*this* daddy.

He shook his head and had no doubt this was the last he would ever see of her. "Look, Miss Amy Turner, local folks don't go no further than this. I couldn't if I wanted to. I—I once had a brother

SHE

who—" His big frame shuddered as he looked back up at those posts in the river, and he clamped his fat little knees together, like a school girl.

Her head whipped up and her little green eyes sharpened, looking off ahead of the boat into the forests that the wet kudzu had jungled up. She wondered for a moment if she heard footsteps, a giant King Kong walking over there past the eerie silhouettes of kudzued trees. No, just her heart. "Now that's not nice, Mr. Sheriff, trying to get me scared."

"I—" He looked at her baffled for a moment, then shook his head again. "Look, I've already been sitting here in these waters at the property line too danged long. I gotta wife and kid to get back to."

"Very well," she said quite primly. She stood, very nearly tumbled out of the boat, and quickly stepped off. Those clean white tennis shoes and pastel socks disappeared as she sank ankle deep into mosquito-mud there at the bank.

"Bit of a walk that'a way," he pointed off into what looked like an impassable tangle of green brier. "Adios, lady." He said the "adios" with a long *a.*

"Now don't you forget to come pick us up, Sheriff. Four o'clock. You said you would?"

He took a long swig from a small canister of crystal clear, smooth-as-a-baby's-butt moonshine he kept down in the bottom of his boat, then pushed off down the river, without answering or looking back.

THE BIRDS OF THE THICKET HAD GROWN REALLY QUIET.

MAD ANDREA CAME TO THE EDGE OF THE WOODS AT BEAR EAR MOUNTAIN RIGHT AT the time she always did to look over at the Big House. Three-foot-tall Still-bots scurried about the hill, in and out of the open house; one stood in the grass with a portable chalkboard, making strange marks like "2 + 2 =" and motioning to the girl named Little Fast, who would then talk about them. Sometimes the Still-bot would extend a white glove on a springy coil of metal and pat Little Fast on the head. Sometimes the Still-bot would whir like a cat purring, then say in Still Man's own voice: "Try again, little one. Try again."

Mad Andrea never smiled, her mouth did not work that way or need to. She was simply silent, full of moon and wide open to the air and grass, the humming of Still-bots and Little Fast, wide open and enthralled by that little girl. And today especially she was in some state of self-oblivious solitude, awed, looking at that girl so familiar yet so foreign. Mad Andrea felt—no, not hopeful, just silent and amazed at this girl and her Still-bot teacher and the procession of strange scratchings in chalk.

Then, however, her watching was disturbed. She turned and smelled the air. Another woman would approach soon; not just yet, but soon. Mad Andrea slipped back a bit in the trees; you should never let anyone or anything see your hide or catch your scent in the backwoods breeze, as this stranger woman was doing all over the place, from down at the river. To be smelled or seen was to be captured. You also should never go to the Big House without a lot of care and stealth, never stand up on Bear Ear Mountain, where hunters and men and coyotes and even the girl

was simply silent, full of MOON and WIDE open to the AIR and GRASS.

might see you, as this new woman apparently was going to do. Mad Andrea could practically see it and she shook her head at it.

She sniffed again: the stranger was not yet off her boat, or was just getting off, but Mad Andrea could tell so many things by just the smelling, her animal-foreknowledge. This other woman wore a layer of clothing, as she'd seen Still Man and Little Fast do, when she watched them walking about. Why would any creature even think of blocking the touch of the wind, sun, moon with another layer of hide? Mad Andrea's own skin bristled. Something dangerous here. Something smelled of roses and chemicals. She knit her brow—as she'd seen Still Man do—then clutched the butcher knife more tightly, the one Still Man had given her on what they'd decided was her birthday. The one she and he had used, with fear and trembling and wildness, on intruders to the wild wood.

She breathed in slowly and turned to look at the Big House. Something moved behind her, then faded back into the patchwork of tree trunks and leaves. Something else moved, and Andrea turned back again, her eyes shining, then her eyes laughing. Without anticipation or further thought, she shot off into the narrow, impossible spaces between the trees. She flew with the deer, seven does at her side—no, six; she the seventh, in the formations of instinct: excellent, beautiful, caught up in the wind-smell trees of the forest. They ran, she and the deer; when they leaped, she leaped; when they leaped again, she flew across the forest floor with them, in her natural spot in a formation too complex for reason. The deer snorted and turned and ran, playing. But as they turned down a trail, she suddenly had to stop. It was the first time she'd ever broken stride with the herd. She did not understand why. She had to look again toward the Big House. She was smelling the stranger-woman. She felt yearning, very, terribly strong, like her heart was being ripped apart. It was not her own yearning, though. She simply smelled and shared it now. It was *his*.

HE SET THE FINAL TOUCH ON THE LITTLE STILL-BOT: A PLASTIC LENS OVER THE ONE EYE. THE TWO-FOOT-TALL PIECE OF MACHINERY WITH THE TRAY ON THE TOP OF ITS head whirred to life, spun around, and said in a new metallic, clanky voice: "May I serve you something?"

Still Man closed his eyes; the rush of melancholy as always was too much: finish a Still-bot, you always saw its limits, whatever its excellences and innovations and virtues—you always saw how its creation was done, not from some great creative impulse but from fear. In the moment one was finished, you saw how you kept yourself back from the real impulse that drove you, the height and the maximum, your own real potential. Fear kept you making robots instead of making life itself.

He glanced involuntarily toward Shirley, sleeping on the couch, her head heavy on top of the book she had been reading now that she'd come in from math. The girl Mad Andrea called Little Fast breathed slowly, deeply from her nap. From the machinery of your own genius, you could reach your hand out like the hand of God, but instead of creating life you created only—inventions; clockwork, wondrous machine Still-bots in the world of the mundane. Funny how this was as close to deity as he could get: sharing in the melancholy of One who could create only image, and not himself.

The living alone could create life, as Mad Andrea had created Shirley, as he had once by letting life itself give itself through his loins. He looked back again at her; he was not afraid he would lose her, that she would be taken from him, or merely go; that was too inevitable to fear it, and had been from the beginning. He looked up and out to the woods. "Mad Andrea?" he whispered, sensing for a moment she might be there again in the kudzu, then feeling in his gut the lost emptiness in the sound and the contradictions in his uttering it. He'd thought he'd seen her walking in the woods, the deer-woman, the wild wisp, really living. In her herd of deer.

And here he was in the Big House, holding back, playing mechanic.

He looked harder, no one there in the woods. Strange how sometimes he sensed her everywhere, without trying; other days, she was invisible.

Now he recognized his yearning. Intimations of movement again: the deer running back by, just beyond the edge of green wood. *Just beyond.*

Recognized as such the yearning began to settle down, thankfully, like a mist starting to thin; it sank deeper into him until it was

silent. Only then did he finally answer the Still-bot's question: "Martini." You drank from fear, too, of yourself. The Still-bot went to make it, with liquors Kurtz himself had distilled.

AMY TURNER LOOKED AROUND AT THE TREE LINE CLOSING IN AND BEGAN TO WONDER IF SHE'D DONE THE RIGHT THING, TRYING THIS ALONE. WHEN YOU FIRST MEET A FAMILY TO investigate them, you don't bust in, for gosh sakes, you don't bring the law and armed guards to win trust and cooperation. And just because a man was *rumored* to be a murderer who strung up men's private parts all over the place, the possibility of which we shudder to even mention, that didn't mean he didn't have a good heart, surely, as everyone else on earth *did*, doggone it, if you just let folks shine a little. She was sure of that, and that a gentle hand might accomplish a lot more in this world than violence and threats. That was a credo for which she had often stood up in public, in speeches, for example, to the Ladies Christian Auxiliary of the First Mount Zion Church of Redgunk, a credo for which she was willing to—

Something moved in the brush close by. Amy Turner caught the breath that was leaving her lips and, like some chameleon with its tongue flicking out and in again lightning-like, shot it right back into her youthful breast. She stopped walking, and when the muddy splooching of her tennis-shoed feet ceased and left only silence and wind and birds and trees creaking ever so slightly, she listened again. Nothing. Nothing there. Maybe just an animal? She shrugged. She smiled at herself, to warm herself, gingerly at first and then quite warmly. Doggone it, a nice smile could win just about anybody over, even your own fearful silly self; it could make someone's day brighter, even yours, even one like this. A good smile was a breath of fresh air and contagious and, doggone it, what was there to be afraid of on a beautiful day like today? Smile: she was very good at smiling; it had won her Miss Congeniality in the Felpham University Sorority Rush her freshman year.

But then again another movement in the woods, only the woods weren't far away from her, as they had been when she'd been in the safety of the boat; they were at her elbow. *Never get off the boat.*

She whipped around. No one there. *Maybe it is an animal.* She'd once heard of a woman camping in Yellowstone on her *own*, on her *period*, whom a bear had attacked: pulled her out of her tent. Rangers found only her disembodied lips the next day. Involuntarily, Amy Turner's fingers went up to her own lips.

But, thankfully, no bears here. Nothing there at her elbow. Nothing a little good attitude wouldn't help. She took a deep breath and clamped her teeth. With her fingertips she pressed her mouth back up into the shape of that smile. *OK, gotta do it: it may very well be a little girl is in trouble; and I'm gonna save her, doggone it.*

She readjusted the weight of her clipboard and all that paperwork from the Child Protection Agency; she took another deep breath, donned her own real smile, girded herself mentally as Old Testament soldiers might, then tromped ahead, down the narrow deer trail she'd been told would lead to his house on what he called Bear Ear Mountain. She could already see herself sitting on a couch with some big ex-con of a man, putting on her sweetest persona and saying, "Now, Mr. Still, I'm here to help you and your daughter. Just a few questions." A smile. "So tell me, where is little Shirley's—mother?"

Leaves to either side of the trail moved in a breeze. She ignored the movement. There were no bears here, to begin with, and she didn't want to even bother thinking about the other possibilities.

I don't suppose she'd ever really thought about a trip-wire, for example, and a stake of carved bamboo shooting from the kudzu, zipping out of the vegetation and running its point through her left shoulder, right close to her heart.

SHE WOKE AND FOR A MOMENT THOUGHT SHE WAS IN FACT LOOKING AT A BEAR. THEN THE THING PURRED LIKE A KITTEN, WHIRLED AROUND LIKE SOME FIGURINE ON A CLOCK, AND spoke: "It is a young woman."

"OK, I'll see to her." Then really a bear. No, a giant mountain of a man, with smooth face but wild, clear penetrating eyes and waves of white hair rushing back in a torrent. And doggone large hands.

She tried to smile a "Mr. Still-uh-man," but the pain kept her from it, and sucked her off into darkness.

A wild dream, like none she'd ever had, so vivid, so impossible: she was running through the woods, the leaves around her dripping and alive, writhing, tendrils, thick succulence. She was like a deer, with hands, with a knife in one hand. Naked and covered with blood.

And then there was another woman looking down at her: tangled hair, smooth and expressionless face, a real butcher knife in hand, leaning over her, sniffing her, touching her with curiosity, like an animal. This wasn't dream, it was memory; before the robot arrived. The wild woman's eyes: sparkling, radiant, lucid, see right through you.

And then dream: she was running again.

What kind of power was here near Bear Ear Mountain, to make her dream such things?

She opened her eyes and thought she saw the wild woman again. She focused.

It was a little girl, in ribbons, T-shirt, cut-offs. The same eyes.

"What's your name?" asked the little girl. It was just a little girl, though she leaned over and sniffed at her. "The bamboo spike would have killed you, you know, if you'd been a few centimeters taller."

Amy Turner remembered she had facial muscles and let them raise up a little smile, her how-do-you-do smile she donned for talking to little children. "I'm Amy Turner and I bet you're Shirley. You're bright."

The girl seemed singularly unimpressed and did not smile back, though she could do it.

"Well, are you—Shirley?"

"You must have been in the woods a while, overnight. Still Man said you lost a lot of blood."

"I—" What the girl had just said jolted through her and she tried to sit up. The pain in her shoulder was too much. "Overnight? I've been here a whole day?"

"You've been here for three days."

"Three. I—what about Sheriff Potter?"

The girl did not bother to respond. Instead, she stepped back and spoke something to someone too short for Amy Turner to see. One of those funky robots whirred off to another room.

Amy looked down the length of the bed and realized she had on a pair of jeans, cheap, very blue, Dollar-Store sale. "These aren't my—."

"Still Man had Jeb Redon go down the river and buy you some. I told them you really needed a nightgown."

"But I—who undressed—I mean—?"

A cold shiver. There was a bear at the door. The little machine guy had fetched Still Man. Still Man approached her, that granite face of his framed by the white wash of hair; lucid eyes; he said nothing.

His look was not one of hate. It was the sort of expression she could imagine one having at seeing that the end of the world was coming in the next moment, not enough time to change it, not enough time to worry about or even regret it: just watching on with all the feeling of all the history of a whole planet. She'd never seen such a look, and seeing it at all woke something in her insides she had never even imagined being there, something she

could not have possibly expressed. As if she, too, for a moment saw what he saw. And then the feeling got too uncomfortable, too big for her or anyone, and she closed her eyes.

He reached over and checked the large bandage on her shoulder. It was then she realized that the shoulder-wrap was all that covered her above the waistline. She felt cold and her nipples snapped hard. But she did not lose her cool: "Do you happen to have a blanket I could cover with?"

Shirley was already lifting it toward her.

"Thanks, Shirley."

"My real name is Little Fast."

Amy Turner nodded, and understood. Somehow, despite herself and her smiles and all her training, she understood, while perhaps she might not have moments before, before seeing Still Man and his natural expression.

THE SHERIFF HAS COME TO LOOK FOR ME?" STILL MAN SAID, "DAN POTTER IS A BRAVE MAN. BUT NOT FOOLISH, IN THAT WAY."

ABANDONED. SHE COULDN'T BELIEVE IT, THAT men would abandon her to this? How the heck was she going to get back to civilization? How the heck was she going to—take Shirley back to the Child Protection Agency or go back down that black river? Without a boat? Without an escort?

"You need rest, still," said Still Man. "Worry is making your skin draw all up. Let it loose for a while." Funny, his voice was a contradictory mix of country, South, Mississippi, and—maybe, like, some gentleman-scholar's, some Ahab's, some warrior's, some high-class murderer's: deep, rich, a beauty beyond good and evil.

Her skin was indeed drawn all up, as he put it. But mostly because of pain. She winced, realizing this.

Still Man turned to one of those mechanical beasts and said something in a language she thought was English but couldn't quite decipher. The little mechanical fellow came back with a wine glass full of a liquid amazingly more clear than water or PGA or anything she'd ever seen. How could liquid get more clear than—clear?

"Drink this, then."

"But what—it smells like alcohol. I don't dri—"

Little Fast, to one side of her, said, "Look here, Amy Turner, my Still Man has been working up here twenty, thirty years perfecting his brews. This has been good for you, kept you alive and comfortable since your invasion onto our property."

"A little alchemy," affirmed Still Man. "Moonshine with all sorts of properties, for all sorts of purposes. This one for healing." So, one had to add Prospero to the Ahab-gentleman-murderer list. There was that look again, too, as if it were his only look, and all looks all at once. Could the mere presence of such a man, so heavy and full and stern, dissolve in you all the mundanity, all the flighty silliness of everyday, all the superficial thoughts and hopes and desires, and somehow leave you open and raw and pulsing and finally—growing? Until this moment, she would never have even understood this possibility.

She shook herself, and quickly put the glass to her lips, smelled—it smelled like diesel, doggone it—and drank the thing down. The world twisted and wrenched away.

She woke. It was dark. Somehow she knew it was night, and three more days later—some vague sense of the passing of time. The pain was gone. There was now only a small patch bandage, where the spear had penetrated her. She also could feel the fabric of a T-shirt. He'd put a T-shirt on her. She sat up.

The room was full of moonlight, and there he was, standing at an open window, in profile, in the shine of the moon. She would have known he was there anyway, without seeing him: he filled the room, his melancholy, his exuberance, his brilliance, it was all-over present, heavy, somehow wonderful.

"You know why I came." She was a little startled by her own voice; somehow little flips at the ends of phrases that she'd never really even noticed had been there, but she must have implanted there herself at some adolescent stage, now were gone. Her voice had strength. Could a man, not saying any more words than what he'd spoken to her, somehow make you stronger, better? More—yourself? He did not respond to her question; he did not have to. She said, "So who is her mother?"

He did not shift, there in the moonlight, or look back into the room. She saw the edge of moon now beyond the window frame: nearly full. It gave his face an aura she could hardly stand.

And now she felt her own face: the smile was gone. Not gone or destroyed, just—not needed here. Not needed for the conversation of two human adults.

When he spoke, he did not speak to her, really, he spoke to the moon, or to the shine of it, everywhere. Even on her. And so he *did* speak to her, and told her everything, as if in last confession. "You want to know about her mother. Twenty years ago, Amy Turner, I still sometimes went down into Blake County, into town. One night I was giving a lecture on 'Aldous Huxley's Theories of Mysticism and the Potential Properties of Corn Liquor.' I did not know I would end up after the lecture with the woman." Why was he telling her anything at all? Surely here was a man with butcher knives and bamboo traps and machine-gun turrets between him and all others. So why—perhaps he himself did not know. "I was with her in her dorm, she no more, surely, than eighteen."

"You don't have to tell me all the detai—."

"I fled. Do you understand how I fled, and what was at stake?"

"No, I—" Somehow she did. And what was at stake now, in his words? She caught tinges of a strange tone; as if he were speaking to the last human, in a last chance to speak.

"In those days, I ran with the animals, as with fleets of gazelles. A little alchemical change, and I ran with the wild. In those days, nature was all in all. I roamed over the hills with the beasts, and even—ate their grass. And then she came up the river, after me. She got in a boat, this eighteen-year-old college girl—"

Amy Turner straightened a little. She herself was not much older. Not much.

"—and came up the river, through the blood marks and warnings, because we'd made love one night, and more than that, more, she sensed something in me she knew she could have, or become; she came for me, for who I was. But also for—and therein was my first mistake, I let her come."

"Why a mistake, why a—"

"We drank together the moonshine I'd worked so hard to make, the particular kind, the elixir that gives innocence."

"Innocence." Funny, how *innocent* Amy Turner had felt herself all along until hearing that word from his lips, how he meant something she only now felt she lacked.

"Have you ever run with gazelles, Amy Turner? What alchemical reactions in our cells must we have, our every cell, so that the woods will take us in? So that we wake up no longer things of mechanics, but of life; so that we stand, crouch, run, and the herds of animals open and admit us, and the whole green world takes us in again?"

She drew in her breath. She was not sure why his words seemed so terrible, so thunderously torn; but now she could not catch her breath or stop the beating of her heart, because they were caught and stopped on their own.

"Amy Turner, you do not know what you take from me, what you must take from me; you do not understand how the earth itself must split apart when men become mere men, and the green world bleeds us out and shrivels back into its own secrets, its own heart, and we are no longer admitted. Do you see?" Was he talking to her or to the moon or to the thick tangle of trees out there in the darkness? "Do you see the revolving, never-ceasing revolutions of time? You want to know the girl's mother? Do you see, we drank the real moonshine, the Elixir of Return, she and I, and ran, and flew and dreamed the animal-earth dreams together, but—there are some, you know, who crack open, take in the world, and do not seal themselves back. I do not say they do not heal, I say simply they don't—come back."

Why are you telling me this?

"For six days and seven nights we lay together that first time, she and I in the whorl of the drink. We ran, we sweated, bled, danced, flew, and thrilled in the animal-moon: and then—"

Amy Turner let out a breath; why was she so full of—want? Startling. She trembled at his energy in the night, at how her own body seemed to have become liquid. Moisture. She did not recognize herself; her body seemed to have its own mute yearning, without consent.

"Then—. Always they come, the limits of the alchemical liquor, my cells using up the brilliant sparkling chemicals of change; I closed back as always, became again machine and intellect, man, human, no longer a thing of the green; but she did not. She did not come back. Lying naked there on top of me that last day, she shuddered to look in my eyes, shuddered and knew, and now fled, herself, seeing what was in jeopardy. Neither she nor gazelles nor birds nor deer, neither possum nor rats could bear to be with me again. Though some nights we are together, still, when I can no longer stand not being there, some nights feeling the moon on our skin, the moon in drops of sweat or blood, the moon in every cell and every molecule, we are sometimes together, but—with me, my limit, the mechanics of being a man who must drink a special mystic liquor to go at all, when we are together every one of my cells and every molecule feels in every sensation how temporary the height. How temporary the height."

Can some young girl after college drink this, too?

"You don't know what you ask, Amy Turner."

Had she asked it out loud? She'd asked it aloud.

Doggone it, what was coming over her?

She'd asked it aloud.

"Your father doesn't like me."

"You've come to take me away from him."

"I'm really here to do what's best, to—"

"He does like you. You should've seen the way his palms paused over your breasts, when he wrapped your shoulder that first time."

"How old are you?"

"He says I'll be bright for my age, compared to the others, down the river."

"Perceptive, too?"

"I don't like you, you know."

"I know."

"I don't want to go back with you. I won't."

"Suppose he told you to go back with me."

Shirley's face flushed and she turned sharply away. She snapped at a Still-bot and then was gone. He'd already spoken to her, hadn't he? He'd already told Little Fast about how she had to go.

The moon was full now, rich, ripe. "You told her she had to go back with me, didn't you? Already? You won't fight me?"

He was there again in the place she would always remember him, if she left this place alive or sane. *If* she did.

He was lost in thought. "You know, *moon*, *month*, and *men*, *mind*, *measure*, and *mania* all share the same linguistic root? Do you believe that if we followed the strands of ancient language down, word by word, root by root, that we would come to a source deeper than words and roots?"

She did not know what he meant, but she'd seen enough of him to know sometimes you had to be simply silent in the reverberance of his voice. "Tell me, Still Man. Can a girl with a master's degree drink this Elixir of Return you have made?" She'd not stopped thinking of it—or of him. She was amazed at her own bravery in asking again.

For the first time all night, he turned from looking at the full moon and faced her directly. His eyes sparkled with sadness. "Don't ask it again. Don't. The answer is no."

She heard the yes of his own longing.

He turned sharply away from her, or from it, and whispered, "Don't you see how it cracks my heart to think it?"

"I do see. I do sense it." He'd lost a woman to it. Or, somehow, lost himself. She was sitting up. No, somehow she was standing up. A little Still-bot whirred and rolled out of her way.

EVERY

Not a college girl with a degree. Not a girl, doggone it, but a woman close enough to extend her hand and touch his. It was like touching a volcano, an earthquake, that was nevertheless absolutely still. As if his flesh itself were contradictory.

He did not withdraw his hand.

She said, "I heard you reading to her last night, Still Man, from the other room. Dr. Seuss, though she can read well enough. I know how much you miss her already, and how much you love her."

"How could you know? It is too big."

"It's big in you, like a glacier; but it is small and human, too. Maybe that's the part you don't know about civilization; that we, too, are capable of it."

Was that a tear streaking his cheek, there where the moon shone in a single line? Funny how such a thing concentrated, reflected, and *made* the shine. Why was he letting her go so easily? Why did he refuse to let her drink—something Amy Turner wanted now, interestingly, almost desperately, for herself.

"Still Man, you act as if drinking your moonshine elixir, its so-called innocence, was a dangerous thing."

"Isn't it?" He grabbed her wrist. This time, this moment, he was violent toward her, for the first time; the grip hurt: "Isn't it?"

"You are afraid I won't come back, too? Your—what have you called her, your Mad Andrea—she obviously wasn't ready. That's why she didn't come back."

"You don't understand. She—" he choked, tightened his grip even more, but turned away, a cloud of emotion following his body in a palpable twist. "She *was* ready."

"I—want to know from the inside, what it is you are about." Had she said *you*? She'd meant to say *it*: Shirley's day-to-day life, or her father or the elixir, or something. She'd said *you*, doggone it. *Be careful: kidnap victims fall in love with their captors, with*— "I want to taste it." What the hell was she saying? "I want to taste it like nothing else." Not just the elixir. Something *real*. Him. "I'm not afraid."

"You don't understand, Amy Turner. It's that I am afraid." Outside somewhere, though this was Mississippi, of course, the gazelles were running in the moonlight.

HIS GRIP ON HER WRIST LOOSENED, BUT HE STILL HELD ON. IT WAS A SLENDER WRIST, SHE KNEW, MORE GRACEFUL THAN THE WAY SHE PERCEIVED THE REST OF HERSELF. SHE closed her eyes and felt his fingers on her, and suddenly the rest of her too was full of a grace she'd never known herself capable of, something serpentine and sinuous and gentle and moonlike opened up inside her woman-body. Maybe it was the moon, that now full moon; no, the moonshine.

She opened her eyes. She did not pull back her wrist. She said, "Are you afraid for her, for Shirley? Is that why you want me to take her away, because she is half Mad Andrea?"

The big man choked just a little, and while nothing changed in the pressure of his touch, he was now holding onto her wrist from his own need.

"Do not think my little girl a monster. I know she is half animal, of course. What else are any of us? But—I have seen her mother

CELL flashed with the SAME STARTLING SHINE.

absorbed into the green world forever and never come back."

"You're afraid she'll be lost, too. You want to protect her from it, but at the same time—you want it—for yourself. You're going to—" Amy Turner looked up and now he turned to face her, right into her eyes. Their eyes met and the moonshine swirled with the power: "You're not coming back, are you, Still Man? *You're* not coming back."

"How could I? How could I?"

Now she could not believe her own words, though she'd wanted it and thought it for hours and days. She said again, more forcefully: "Take me with you, Still Man. Take me with you."

His face somehow in the moonshine had drifted closer. Close enough others might have let lip brush lip, mouth touch mouth. Instead the power of the air shining between them made them tremble. *It* trembled. And he released her. and went to get the potion.

While he was gone, she stood looking at the moon, heavy over the forest. She was no longer in a state of disbelief at what she wanted, what she was doing. While he was gone, she removed the T-shirt.

When he came back slowly, softly, he carried two crystal wine glasses. The moon reflected in the cuts of crystal in hers. But the same moon literally *shone* from his.

She felt it burn inside her, past her lips and into her gut and instantly into every cell. Darkness. Moon. And then she tried to suck his potion from his lips, from his throat, from his soul, but could not, tasting only blood, biting, tasting, loving with body alone.

A howl. There was lightning. Two naked bodies, twirled together. Sweat. Thoughts gone like thin mist. Now only physical embodied skin-things and muscle, they ran. Lightning came from the trees, lightning made of moonshine stuff; they flew through it, fleet-footed fast. Every cell flashed with the same startling shine.

The thicket opened wide to take them in, though the kudzu and green brier and tiny crawling green animals were everywhere, up-close dense, in their hair, in the air, on their skin; green touched every pore.

Her body grunted with it: rough-hewn sound, almost like a roar, thunder, cry; and she ran on with that sound coming from her, her legs slender and naked, the moon laughing on her skin: part tiger and part deer and part bird. Human, but not. Something glowing, uncanny, running, and all the wild runners of the night, all the coyotes and the brilliant elephants and the giant bear and the tiny skeletons of leaf, all ran fleet-footed across wide horizons of night, with stars twirling, and the round, round full moon calling the dance and the lovemaking, the wild scream-opening of all cells, into madness and spirals beyond madness.

She fell, stumbled, picked up, ran, fell; the stars blinked. In the woods, deep in the woods, black rain fell; lightning flashed in some distant place beyond the trees where Still Man still ran on, increasingly and irrevocably distant. "Still Man!"

There was blood on her chest, running down her breast. Had that wound come open? She twisted her head around to look up: there was a monster straddling her, with wild night-eyes, and a shining knife. Amy Turner twisted onto her back, naked, raw, scratched, her flesh singing with the pain.

Thoughts coming back. Thoughts. "Mad Andrea?"

Mad Andrea lowered herself so that their faces were too close. the smell of death.

"I—"

The knife. The knife slid over her skin, her belly, her chest. Mad Andrea raised it, poised. Did there have to be a sacrifice for life to run on?

Amy Turner ran her own fingers into the blood on her chest. Not her own. Mad Andrea dripped blood, not from some wound, but from every pore, from the passion of the green world oozing through, screaming through her, pulling back.

Knife raised.

Then something moving, on the forest edge.

Gazelles. They halted, watching. Mad Andrea stopped, too, sensing that they waited, watched, that they—might leave her? The wild woman gasped. There with the moon framing her head, she raised the knife higher and plunged it down into soil. Gone.

Amy Turner raised herself up, naked, from the dirt. There she went off in the distance, the mad woman, side by side with deer and gazelles and leaping things. Behind her, lumberingly big but somehow still part of the formation, as swift, as fast, as mad, a man, who might have been a bear, but was somehow really, completely a man.

Then they were gone, the gazelles and the folk of the green, into the closing thicket, with the clouds and the rain and the moon-lightning following, leaving only calm.

Involuntarily, Amy Turner reached her hand after them, just as the thicket closed entirely.

"I want you to find the stuff he drank. Not the stuff he put in my glass, but—the real stuff. The permanent stuff." The little Still-bot went off to do her bidding, even though it knew in every machine joint and gear how futile the search would be. She knew, too, like some Juliet wanting poison, that he had not left her a drop, here in this bare tomb of whirring Still-bots. Damn it.

Doggone it.

"I won't let you take me with you, Ms. Turner. I don't care if he did want me to go."

It was Little Fast—Shirley.

"I wouldn't know how to get us back, even if I wanted to," Amy snapped, her voice on the jagged, bleeding edge. But now—now she was enough herself again to be surprised at the tone, to realize how unlike herself it was.

Her self? She hated the idea. She had to get back. "Find it," she snapped at the Still-bot. Its little lensed eye twirled and gazed at her incredulously. Amy slumped. "I don't know how to get back." Did she mean back down the river—or out past the thicket-horizon, where the green folk had gone?

She looked at Shirley and realized why he'd not put up a fight. Of course, he'd invented the permanent solution for himself, but he had waited like a parent for the right time, for some Amy Turner to come here to do what she had to do to protect his girl.

"He left a boat for you," the Still-bot said. "In good order." It was Still Man's voice.

And then she was running, Shirley that is, running fast and strong and away. But Amy Turner came after her, faster, stronger; caught her and held her and let her cry.

Fast and strong, like a little girl.

"I did find this." Amy Turner looked up, startled by the voice, expecting ... someone besides the machine. She looked at the Still-bot, then took the paper from its spring-extended hand. *His* paper, no doubt. left for her to read. But no words.

It was a rough drawing of the moon. His pencil, no doubt.

Done in the hand of a child. ❧

TINY FLOWERS & ROTTEN LACE

BY JAY LAKE

ILLUSTRATION BY LORI KOEFOED

THE BRICK MONSTER LEFT FOOTPRINTS WHERE TIMMY WOULD SEE THEM. MOSSY WITH RED FLECKS, the prints were longer than his fifth grade math book and almost as wide—huge feet. Every day walking to and from school in the Oregon winter rain, he would see the tracks. Sometimes they were on the sidewalk, sometimes in the grass at the park. He hadn't seen the brick monster yet, but he knew it was around. ■ Was it following him home or leading him there? He didn't know which was scarier. ■ One day after school, Timmy stopped by the saggy old wall at the corner of Lafayette Street. It held up the bottom of the steep yard of the house that once belonged to his grandmother, the bricks keeping the garden from sliding over the sidewalk and into the street. His grandmother had died before he was born, but Dad had told him this was where Mom had grown up. The red bricks were stained black with mold and grime, covered with moss. They were exactly like the brick monster's footprints. ■ "Hey," Timmy whispered to his grandmother's wall. Maybe the brick monster could hear him here, through his family's old bricks. That idea felt stupid, but the footprints were real. "Stop following me. You're scary." ■ "Help," the wall whispered back in a great, slow voice that creaked like his house in a windstorm. "Help me." ■ Timmy dropped his book bag and sprinted all the way home, screaming. ■ That night in bed, Timmy's butt stung from Dad's whipping for losing the book bag. Upstairs his mother shrieked at the walls to shut up and leave her alone. For the first time in his life, Timmy knew what she was talking about. ■ Unable to sleep, Timmy stared at his window. It was old-fashioned, narrow, and tall. The streetlight outside made weird shadows on the shade as it shone through the lilac bush. The house was wood, but the basement walls were brick. Could the monster come through them? ■ The window rattled. Timmy jumped, drawing the sheet to his chin. Something tapped on the glass, then the window gave a grinding squeak as if it were being tugged upward. It sounded like the glass was about to break. The orange shadows of the streetlight shifted as the lilac bush shook. ■ "Go away!" he shouted, pulling the covers over his head. A bus roared by outside. Then all Timmy could hear was his mother yelling again. She finally stopped for breath. The sudden silence echoed with the creaking of the old house. ■ After a while Timmy stuck his head out again and watched the shadows on the window shade. They were back to normal. He waited a bit more, then got the flashlight from his secret box of R.L. Stine books and slowly raised the shade to look at the window. ■ A huge handprint filled the center of the glass. It was hard to tell for sure in the flashlight's glare, but he was certain it was made of moss and brick dust. The brick monster *had* come for him.

IT DOESN'T DO
MUCH GOOD TO BURY
FAMILY SECRETS—SOONER
OR LATER THEY'LL RISE
UP AND CRUSH YOU.

THE NEXT DAY at school he got beat up for bringing his lunch in a Fred Meyer grocery sack. When Timmy had been a dorky fourth grader, fifth graders were cool. Now he was a fifth grader, and he was still dorky as ever. Things never seemed to get better. Dumb stuff like carrying a paper sack or wearing cheap blue canvas shoes just made it worse. The brick monster was scary, but it hadn't tried to hurt him, which was more than he could say for the cool kids.

During lunch Timmy hid between the rusted green dumpster and the outside wall of the cafeteria. He didn't have anything to eat, not after Ti-Shaun and his friends had stomped Timmy's jelly sandwich into the leaves that morning, so he wasn't missing much. At least in the damp, smelly shadows he was safe, and alone.

"Timmy," whispered the orange bricks of Rhone Elementary School.

He shrieked, jumped up to run, and banged his head on the dumpster. Timmy sat down with a thump, his ears ringing.

"Timmy…" This voice was drier than the garden wall on Lafayette Street, bricks mixed with rustling paper and squeaky chalk. Timmy realized it had a smell, too, old wood and a little bit of mold, like the attic at home.

"What?" Timmy rubbed the sore spot on his head.

"Help me."

Timmy scuffed at the wall with his canvas shoes. "Help you what?"

This time he saw the faint movement in the bricks, like gigantic lips pressed through the skin of a balloon. "Come to your grandmother's garden."

"I ain't talking to no walls," Timmy said fiercely. He didn't want to be like his Mom, not now, not ever. He got up, more carefully this time, and fled to the doubtful safety of the cafeteria.

Walking home from school that afternoon, he saw that the brick monster had been busy. Grass was trampled along the curbs. Mucky red footprints spread on the damp sidewalks. When he looked real close, twigs were snapped in the bushes of some yards. Had it been dancing? Or fighting?

At Lafayette Street, Timmy almost crossed to the other side of Milwaukie Avenue to avoid his grandmother's wall, but that would be sissy. He stayed on the sidewalk, as far from the old bricks as he could get. He glanced over as he walked past the wall. One of the bricks wiggled.

Timmy stopped. A hairy root sprouted in the crack between the loose brick and its neighbors, twisting like a worm. The brick slid outward slightly, paused, then shot toward him.

Timmy leapt into the street, only to dash back onto the sidewalk as a UPS truck honked. The jumping brick lay shattered. He nudged it with the toe of his shoe. The brick's rectangular shape collapsed to dust. A bright, shiny bullet rolled out from what had been a little space in the middle of the brick.

He looked back at the garden wall. The hole where the brick had just been was filled with tiny blood-red flowers, as if the brick had vanished years before. Timmy slipped the bullet in his pocket and followed the brick monster's tracks all the way home.

THAT NIGHT MOM thought she was a bird, and kept jumping down the stairs to crash into the steamer trunk on the bottom landing. After she sprained her ankle, Dad finally padlocked their bedroom door from the outside.

"Timmy," Dad said with tears in his eyes when he came back downstairs. "You can't tell no one about this. They'll take her away from us."

When Dad hugged him, Timmy kept the bullet clenched tight in his fist. Then Dad asked him what had happened to the Fred Meyer grocery bag and the hugging stopped.

Later, the brick monster tapped on his window for hours, but Timmy put a pillow over his head and told himself he was in faraway Araby with a magic lamp and a genie for a friend and no parents but his mother wit and the luck of a widow's son.

IN THE MORNING, someone had used a scrap of brick to scratch "HELP ME" on the sidewalk in front of their house. Timmy found it when he stepped outside to go to school, and spent five minutes scuffing it with his shoe so Dad wouldn't see.

All the way to class, walls whispered and cried, but he ignored them. Timmy got detention for being late. He didn't care. Detention meant he didn't have to go home. He forgot his lunch, too.

When he finally left school around four, some of the cool kids were outside—Ti-Shaun, Jason, and Zachary. They straddled really nice eighteen-speed mountain bikes, not like the rusty old one-speed banana bike Timmy had in the garage at home.

"Hey, Timmy," said Ti-Shaun. "Where's your book bag?"

Timmy tucked his chin down and tried to step around them. Jason walked his bike to the left to block Timmy. "Don't want to talk to your friends?"

"Don't got no friends," Timmy told his feet. He stuck one hand in his pocket, clutching the bullet.

"Sure you do," said Zachary. "Timmy talks to the walls, 'cause he ain't got no balls. Been taking lessons from your Momma?"

Timmy looked up at them, his eyes clouded with tears. He squeezed his face tight, holding his anger and shame and hurt inside until he felt like he'd burst. "My mother ain't none of your business."

All three of the boys laughed. "She ain't none of no one's business anymore," said Zachary. "Least of all her own. She crazy enough to try to put diapers on you, crybaby?"

Timmy thrust his hand out, with the bullet in his fist, then opened it. "This is for you guys if you don't leave me alone."

"Ooh," said Zachary, glancing at the other two boys. "Timmy's got a gun." He leered at Timmy. "Ever hear of zero tolerance, loser? We've got your ass now. You ever say a word about us, we'll turn you in. Never come back to school, go to juvenile hall. You are *so* screwed, shithead."

They rode off laughing.

When he got to his grandmother's garden wall, Timmy leaned against it and whispered to the blood-red flowers. They glistened like raw liver as he brought his lips close to them. He could smell dirt and old metal.

"I'll help you," he said. "Whatever you want. But you have to help me."

"Good," said the wall. Its voice was stronger now, more confident, as if Timmy had fed it just by being there. "Bring a shovel. Come back tonight."

Timmy bolted his way through the cold beanie-weenies Dad slapped down for dinner. Mom was upstairs, singing at the top of her lungs about stars in the sky.

"Don't bother her, son," Dad said with a growl. "At least she's peaceable."

Not trusting himself to speak, Timmy nodded. "Uh-huh," he grunted as Dad continued to glare.

"I'm going out. Do your homework, go to bed by nine."

Timmy hadn't done homework in weeks, not since he first saw the brick monster's footprints, and he hadn't brought home any of Mrs. Williams' notes, either. He just nodded.

Dad cuffed Timmy in the side of the head, smiled one of his rare smiles, and walked out the back door, padlocking it from the outside like he always did when he went out at night.

Timmy waited ten minutes, then climbed through the living room window by the gas meter, the garage key in his hand. He got a short garden shovel and pair of gloves and laid them behind the meter, then scrambled back into the house. He figured going to the wall tonight meant after Dad got home, around two in the morning. That would be safest.

TIMMY WOKE TO THE sound of giggling. He was still fully dressed, but had fallen asleep despite his best efforts.

"Shhh!" his Dad whispered, except way too loud.

"Why?" It was a woman's voice, not Mom. She giggled again.

"My mother's asleep upstairs," said Dad. "We have to do it down here."

Even more giggling. "Oh, Roger," said the woman.

His Dad's name was Warren.

Timmy heard the couch springs creak. How was he going to get out? He crept over to his bedroom window. It was nailed shut, like most of the windows in the house. Could he slip through the hall to the bathroom, and wait for Dad and his friend to fall asleep or something?

Timmy hung his shoes around his neck, strings tied together, and snuck into the hall. One end opened into the kitchen and the bathroom, the other end opened to his room and living room. The lower stair landing was in the middle. He peeked around the corner into the kitchen.

The back door was cracked open.

Timmy waited until the giggling got real loud, then dodged through the kitchen and out the door. On the back steps, he struggled into his shoes. He was free.

The shovel clanked against the gas meter when he pulled it out.

"What the hell was that?" Dad asked, his voice coming through the glass of the window just above Timmy's head.

"Come on, Roger," whined the woman.

Just then Mom started singing real loud about angels on high. Timmy sprinted toward the street as the shouting began.

The wall greeted him when he got there, in a voice that echoed with the secrets of the night. "Timmy. Follow the flowers. Dig. Set me free and I will set you free."

He pushed his fingers into the soil where the brick had jumped out. The blood-red flowers around his hand looked black in the moonlight. He carefully uprooted them, set them near the curb on the damp grass, then put on the gloves and began prying away more bricks with the shovel.

There was a sigh, relief and sadness, as he pulled at the wall. Roots and soil tumbled onto the sidewalk. He heard a rattle and bent to pick up the next bullet.

It wasn't a bullet, it was a tiny bone, spotted and damp. Timmy gasped and dropped it. Then he poked at the soil with his shovel. Dirt slipped toward him, a miniature landslide, and a skeleton hand stuck out. It was small, no bigger than his.

Timmy whimpered, but the wall had said it would help him. Help him with the boys at school, stop Dad from hitting him and Mom, make his life be good like other kids'. Hesitant to touch the bones even through his gloves, Timmy tugged gently at the hand. It popped free with a snap, collapsing to pieces in his grip. There was a longer arm bone still hanging from the soil, with little flecks of dirt and brick stuck to it, wrapped in a few scraps of rotten lace.

Timmy retched, holding his stomach down with tears in his eyes, then continued digging. He found a skull, hollow-eyed with a hole in the temple, staring from the dirt. The rotten ruins of a lace-trimmed dress circled the bones of the neck. Tucked under a shoulder of the skeleton was a rusted old flour tin.

He stopped digging and pulled the tin out, trying not to touch the bones any more than he had to. The lid was stuck, but Timmy banged the tin against the bricks until he could pop it loose. Inside he found a wooden-handled revolver wrapped in a dishtowel, and two more bullets loose on the bottom of the tin. Timmy fiddled with the revolver until the cylinder popped open, then slipped the bullets in.

It worked just like in the movies. And just like the movies, the gun would make him a hero, make Dad be nice to him and Mom, make the bullies leave him alone.

The skull stared at the street, blood-red flowers already creeping like snakes from its eye sockets and the bullet hole in the temple. Timmy realized he was done here. The girl behind the bricks was set free, out where others would find her and take care of her, and he had the gun to help him as promised. Taking his gloves and shovel along with the gun, Timmy left. Walls whispered and cried as he walked home, but Timmy didn't care about their voices anymore.

Clutching the revolver, he hid in the rhododendron next to the back steps of the house, where his Dad would come out in the morning. The bricks of the foundation whispered sweet lullabies to him until Timmy dreamed of faraway Araby and the sunny sands of freedom.

HE WOKE TO the sound of sirens going by in the street out front. Even as he blinked his eyes, Timmy realized the police were heading for Lafayette Street and the garden wall he'd torn apart last night. It was raining again. He sneezed.

The gun lay in his lap, warm to the touch. Timmy used the corner of his shirt to wipe the water off the old revolver and carefully cocked back the hammer. Moments later, the door above him creaked open. Timmy raised the gun, his hands quivering. Mom stuck her head out, looked around, then smiled down at him.

"Good morning, Timothy."

It was the first time in months she'd even said his name. Somehow, the way she said it sounded a little bit like the voice of the wall.

The gun shook wildly. "Mom?"

"My sister is finally happy." She leaned down and held out her hand. "Give me the gun, Timothy. It doesn't belong to you."

He wasn't quite ready to hand it over yet. "Where's Dad?"

She glanced toward a muddy bare spot in the back garden. Timmy could see his shovel leaning against the fence. Even from where he sat, it was obvious that the soil had been churned in a long, narrow patch, then pounded down by someone with large, heavy feet. The brick monster had been here while he slept.

"Dad ran off last night with some woman he met in a bar," Mom said.

Timothy stood up and handed his mother the gun. "Be careful."

"It's not loaded," she replied. Her smile drew tight. "I'm going to visit your grandmother's grave. You coming?"

"It's a school day, Mom," he protested, sneezing. "But I'll come," he added when he saw her face collapse toward tears.

"Good." Mom smiled. "We can return her gun together." She glanced down at the weapon in her hand. "Your father borrowed it many years ago. He never gave it back."

On the bus on the way to the cemetery, she let him look at his grandmother's gun again. Timmy peered into her purse, careful not to pull the gun out where people would see it. The bullets really were gone.

"Mom."

She brushed a damp curl of hair from her cheek. "Hmm?"

"Who was she?"

His mother sighed. "My sister."

"I don't have an aunt."

"You did. Years ago."

Timmy's hand rested inside her purse, touching the gun. It was like handling a metal snake. "But Dad ..."

"We dated in high school." She leaned her head against the glass of the bus window. "Things happened."

HIS MOTHER STILL sang in the night, but during the day she was mostly OK. Dad never came back, but a few days after he found the gun, Timmy saw the brick monster from a distance, early in the morning as he walked to school. It was huge, a rough and rotten statue covered with moss and grime, and it had Ti-Shaun dangling from one giant hand and Zachary from the other. Jason grabbed at Ti-Shaun's leg, screaming and crying. Timmy heard his own name booming on the wind, and he smiled down at his feet. When he looked up again, all three boys sprawled on the ground, their mountain bikes crushed. Timmy never saw the brick monster's footprints again.

Tiny blood-red flowers grew in the back garden for years after. Sometimes in the winter, Timmy would find scraps of rotten lace twisted among them, little messages from his aunt. He figured she was happy, that the lace was just a reminder of the things that could happen in a person's life.

After a while, Timmy didn't really mind that Dad was gone, and he was glad to have Mom back, but sometimes he missed the brick monster. ❧

RATTLER

WHO SAYS YOU CAN'T TEACH AN OLD DODGE NEW TRICKS?

We heard this in a truck stop in Oklahoma. Two men in the next booth were talking about dogs, and one said that he had trained pointers and setters of several breeds, and that it was much easier to train a bird dog if you had a trained dog that would hunt at the same time—that the trained dog taught the untrained one.

It don't (the other man said), or not so's you could notice. I've hunted with dogs all my life, and I ain't never noticed no dog teaching but one. That German shorthair you got now learns, sure enough. But the other don't teach it. It just sees what the other's doin' and sees you like it. That's all. That pup wants to please, so it does like the other dog.

No, sir, I never seen nor heard of but one dog that taught like a regular teacher would, and that was a ol' coon hound I used to have. Bud his name was. Ol' Bud taught sure enough, only it wasn't no other dog he taught. I reckon he thought that would be too easy for him. Or else maybe he never wanted to see another dog smarter than he was. That there was the smartest dog ever made. I could tell you—well, you wouldn't believe it. And it ain't to the point anyways, you know.

BY GENE WOLFE & BRIAN HOPKINS ILLUSTRATION BY JOEL F. NAPRSTEK

Old Rattler

You seen my ol' pickemup what we rode out here in? I parked it in the barn back then like I do now, and Bud was always feered he'd miss a ride, so he slept in the back so I couldn't go off without him 'less I chased him out first. It got so anytime I nailed up a coonskin, Bud would tear it down and carry it back there to sleep on. He had quite a pile there before long. I'd nail 'em higher and higher, and I never did figure out how he moved the ladder.

Oh, sure, he could climb it all right. Any coon dog worth a biscuit can climb, you bet! They'll climb trees and such if there's limbs for 'em, to get at the coon.

Bud got hisself a nice pile of coonskins in the back of my pickup, and he'd sleep back there just about every night. If I had to put hay bales or somethin' in the back I'd have to chase him out, and throw all them coonskins out, too, 'fore I could do it. Only if I was just goin' into town to pick up fixin's and maybe some beer, I'd leave him and his coonskins right where they was and ride him into town to watch my truck.

Well, sir, one day I drove that ol' pickemup into town 'cause I had to go to the bank, and when I come out there was a kid hangin' around it, you know, and I heard Bud growl. "You get away from there," I says, and he growls at the kid again. I took three or four more steps, and it hit me that Bud was dead. He'd died the week before, and I'd buried him out in the back of my wood lot and read over him, too, changing a couple words so it was dogs 'stead of people, you know how you do, and put up a marker for him that I'd cut his name in.

It was his ghost was what I thought. He'd loved that ol' truck and come back to it, and I went goosefleshed all over. Felt like my skin was goin' to crawl right off me. Only when I started up the engine I heard the growl just like before. That same exact growl, you know. It was the starter motor, and it was my ol' pickemup that had been growlin'.

After that I noticed a few things. Like if I'd parked by a tree or the light pole or somethin', there'd be a little puddle of gas when I pulled out. I put newspaper under, you know how you do, to see where it was leakin', only it wasn't. Bone dry. Then I was ridin' a feller and he said what a nice truck, and it lost the back like it was on ice. Just a teeny little it was, but I noticed. It quit pretty quick but I got to thinkin' why'd it do that, and by-'n-by it come to me—he'd been waggin' his tail.

So I called him Bud a while, you know, thinkin' he was hauntin' it, only that truck never did cotton to the name. After that I tried various names that didn't none of 'em work. And he give me some trouble, always wantin' to chase coons. You know how you'll drive at night and see a coon in your headlights? I always try to miss 'em. I been a coon hunter all my life, and the more coons the better the huntin' is, is the way I see it. Only that ol' pickemup had been learned by Bud real good and he'd chase after 'em. Took me right through a bobwire fence once and 'bout a half a mile over the prairie 'fore I could get him stopped. I killed the lights and drove out quiet as I could, you bet!

Well, sir, one time he took off after a coon and I was wrestlin' the wheel and stompin' the brake tryin' to get him back on the road. You know how you do. And I hollered out, "Stop! Stop you derned ol' rattler!"

And he done it. So I knew then what his name was do you see, and I call him Rattler when I got to get his attention or quiet him down when I take him to the vet—the mechanic's what I mean, that OK Auto Repair place in town. Only Rattler, he likes vet better, and if you'll just quit interruptin', I'll let you have your say.

(The first man, the one who trained bird dogs, spoke at some length at this point. We will not give his entire argument word for word, but he was skeptical.)

Well, sir, (the other man said) you're just like to Junior. He's my brother-in-law, the dumb fat one. He seen Rattler and rode in him and all, and he just kept on sayin' how'd you get him to do that? I tol' him just like I tol' you, but it took a heap of tellin' 'fore he'd believe me. Then he said whatever a dog could do he could do. Dumbest thing I ever heard a man say. I says can you scratch your neck with your back foot, Junior? Everybody laughed—this was at the Baptist Social, you know—and he got mad and shut up, which was what I wanted.

'Bout a month after, he let drop that he'd been teachin' hisself. Had a big green pickemup with a crew cab he cared the world about, you know, and he said he'd talk to it while he was drivin'. What's its name? I says. He tells, and it wasn't the truck's name but the company that made it. Dumbest thing I ever heard. So I asks if he's taught it to fetch. He says not yet, how's it goin' to do that? You watch I says.

So right there's where I took a big chance. I'll be square with you like I always am, and say if I had it to do over again probably I wouldn't. But I was mad and wanted to show Junior, and I got ol' Rattler and I says, "You see that calf with the white blaze? Fetch!"

Well, sir, Rattler hadn't had a lot of practice workin' cattle back then but he made me proud. He never blowed his horn or nothing that would get the calf stirred up. No, sir! And he never bent. You can't with cattle. You bend, and they'll walk all over you. He showed that calf what he wanted, and he let down his tailgate and sort of pulled in the back shocks so his back set so low his tailgate dragged.

The calf, he turned and went off, you know how they do, only Rattler was out in front of him fast, still low, still got his tailgate down and talkin' quiet with his engine. That went on for about five minutes. Coulda been ten. Then the calf give in and walked up into the back. Rattler shut his tailgate—you know how you do when you're headin' back home? He just shut it and shut it pretty quiet, but there was a world of satisfaction in it. He'd done the job, and he knew he'd done it. He come back to where we was waitin', and he showed off a little then. Flashed his headlights at us, you know. It was broad daylight, too. I reckon he couldn't help it, he just felt so good.

And so'd I. I turned to Junior and I says that's fetch, and it's pretty easy to teach. He went off without another word, and that suited me fine. Every time he opens his mouth I hear more than I want to, even if it's just hello.

So that was that for about a month. Only one day I had to ride Junior into town to get his truck back from the OK Auto Repair place. He got to talking about how tough them pickemups was to train. "Junior," I says, "we got to face the facts, and the fact is you don't know nothin'. You get you a good truck, and it's instinct. It's born in a good pickemup, and you oughter know that. All you got to do is get a good 'un to start and bring the instinct out. I never seen a

IT AIN'T EASY FOR A PICKEMUP TO CLIMB A TREE, NO MORE THAN FOR A HOUND, AND THEY GOT THE SAME TROUBLE—THEIR TIRES AIN'T SHARP.

good coon hound that would point birds, and neither have you. Neither has anybody. Now you take ol' Rattler here." And then I leaned back like I was a passenger, you know, and laced my hands behind my head the way you do.

He kept right on a-goin' about ten miles, and then he come to where a coon'd crossed the road, and he got the scent. He follered it off into the woods, and you could hear that gearbox bayin' and then the muffler comin' in deep where the J-B Weld had got scraped off. It was as pretty a music as you ever heard.

Ol' Rattler treed that coon, too, and right there I would say is where the real trouble come in. I oughter have stopped him right there and me and Junior got out and had a look at the coon—from the ground is what I mean—and got back in and drove away. Only I wanted to show off. I never touched the wheel nor the brake nor the clutch. I give him his head, you know.

And he started up the tree after that coon, goin' to run him over even if it was fifty feet up in the air.

It ain't easy for a pickemup to climb a tree, no more than for a hound, and they got the same trouble—their tires ain't sharp. Rattler'd get up a ways, and hook his front bumper on a limb, you know how they do, probably. And he'd feel around with his front wheels trying to get traction. He's got front-wheel-drive, naturally. If he hadn't had that we'd still be tryin' to get up that tree. Front-wheel-drive and all it still took quite a time.

Finally he got pretty close and I got out my ol' Ruger Bearcat and put a long rifle in the coon where it would hurt, and he fell out of the tree. Rattler come down then, a lot faster than what he went up. Junior was a might shaken up, you know.

I got out and threw the coon in the back and off we went, me feelin' right proud and Junior sort of lookin' out the window and swearin' to hisself. I wouldn't let him do it where I could hear. It's bad luck to hear a fool cuss—I guess you know.

I'd pretty much forgot about all that when Midge phoned me up. Midge's Junior's wife and a nice girl. I never did figure out why she married him 'less she felt sorry for him, and after that the rest of us felt sorry for Midge. "You got to do somethin'," she says. "He's tore up his truck three times since the picnic. He keeps gettin' it fixed and there's no money for anythin'."

Well, sir, that picnic had been on the Fourth of July, it wasn't August by a week, so I could see the thing was serious. I phoned up Junior that night and I says I'd heard he'd been teachin' his truck and maybe he could come by and show me. He hemmed and hawed just like I'd been scared he would, and we went Æround a few times on it, him talkin' five to my one like usual. I'd hol' the phone away from my ear, you know how you do, 'til it got quiet, then I'd come back. And all the time I was thinkin' how I could hook him. Them that won't go for a night crawler will bite on a shiner sometimes. You know how that is.

Pretty soon it come to me that what with Midge not gettin' the house money the table was likely pretty poor over there. So I says why don't you and her come for dinner? Sarah's baked, and we'll barbecue and have us a slap-up good feed. So he come just like I knew he would and Midge too.

After we et I got him in the truck, said I wanted to go into town and get more ice cream. I knew that'd fetch him, which it did; he jumped into that new truck of his and strapped hisself in like he was going to the NASCAR. Soon's we were out on the county road I says, I hear you been learning this pickemup of yours, Junior. What does it do?

Well, he just shook his head.

Maybe you got it to sit up and beg, I says. That's a real pretty trick when a truck does it, and lets you get the oil filter off easy, too.

"I been talkin' and talkin'," he says—which I believed, you bet!—and showin' it how every which way, and the only thing I've learned it is to roll over."

That's a good trick too, I says, only if you don't mind I'm going to get out before you show it, and I'm sure you'll get out too 'cause you're a big man and that seatbelt you're wearin' can't take but just so much.

"It won't do it unless I'm inside and hol'in' the wheel," Junior says, "and I ain't goin' to do it anyhow 'cause it tears up the cab too bad."

That had me scratchin' and whistlin'. Not that I didn't know what was wrong. I'd knew before we ever got off my property. Midge was the puzzler, do you see? I'd promised I'd help out all I could, so I couldn't just tell Junior flat out, 'cause it'd probably make him worse. I thought and thought, and finally I says, you know, it ain't only the student that learns. I noticed that myself and probably you have too. Sometimes the teacher learns as much as he does. More, now and then. Have you learned anything from teachin' this here pickemup, Junior?

"I have," he says. "I've learned that this here is the dumbest derned truck ever come off a assembly line."

I keeps my voice real gentle when I says, now that ain't so. This here truck has a automatic transmission, Junior. You don't have to tell it what gear. It *knows*. Can't nobody say a truck like that's dumb.

"You mean it's teachin' me," he says.

That's for you to say, Junior, I says real gentle-like. Only I don't believe anybody's ever goin' to teach a pickemup that has a automatic anythin'.

We got the ice cream real quiet and come back real quiet, too, and I kept tellin' myself how nobody'd ever got anythin' through that thick skull of Junior's but I'd promised Midge and done the best I could.

Well, sir. Come Thanksgivin' we had the whole family over, and Junior, he got to talkin' about a cattle auction that was coming up in about a week and what might be good to buy now, and what might be good to sell, and what to look for dependin' on who came. For a while he was flappin' along pretty fair like always. Then he sort of spaced out the words more and give a little time between orations where somebody else might speak a word if they was inclined, which he never done before. I noticed pretty quick, and I seen there was something in his eyes that I'd never seen there before in the whole time since I started courtin' his sister. It took me a while to read the brand, you know, 'cause I kept thinkin' I had to be wrong. Then he said somethin', and I knew for certain sure. It was thoughts. There was somethin' goin' on behind those eyes, and the eyes knew it like they always do.

Junior, I says, that's plumb smart, and I notice you're taking your time with it more than usual, if you don't mind me sayin' it.

"Well," Junior says, "that auction's a long grade and a steep 'un, and sometimes a feller needs to shift down."

That was all the other man said, and the bird dog man held his peace, trying to digest everything just as we were. Soon the waitress brought checks to both booths. We paid—and so did they—and started out.

"To see a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wild flower."

Brian looked around at Gene and said, "Did you say that?"

"No," Gene said, "I think it was Robert Blake."

When we got outside, the two men who had been in the next booth were already there. One shouted, "Here, Rattler!" and we heard an engine start in the parking lot.

A small pickup truck, old and red, drove up to the door and stopped.

"Not like that you derned fool," one man said, "I got to get behind your wheel."

The truck pulled away, and returned with its left side toward the curb. The door opened, and the driver got in. "You'll have to open your own door," he told his friend. "He ain't learned that yet."

We stood watching until the small red truck pulled out onto the highway, and it appeared to us that when it did the driver was still fumbling in his pocket for his keys. ❧

The Flowers of Tekheli

BY LIZ WILLIAMS • ILLUSTRATION BY ALLEN DOUGLAS

This early in the year, it was very cold, almost twenty below zero. Fairuza huddled in her heavy coat in the back of the car, an old Mercedes of which Arshan was inordinately proud. Fairuza wished that her brother had saved the money and bought a cheaper car, a Yugo perhaps, from some local dealer. She remembered her father, grumbling: *These Western cars, they're not built for Kazakhstan's roads. The tires are no good, the engines can't take the cold.* Fairuza did not know if this was true, but she did not like the way Arshan drove the vehicle: too fast, skidding around the corners on the high steppe road from Almaty to Taldy-Kurgan. Besides, it was dark and snowing. She leaned forward and tapped Arshan on the shoulder.

"Slow down. You're scaring me!"

In the mirror, she saw her brother grin.

"You want to get home, don't you? If we make it to town before midnight, mum and dad will still be up."

"I want to get home in one piece, Arshan."

"Stop nagging, Fairuza." That was Arshan's friend Pavel, in the front seat. "He knows how to drive. He doesn't need a woman telling him what to do."

"I don't like the way he's driving, that's all," Fairuza said. Beside her, Chinghiz patted her hand.

"It's cool, Fairuza."

Fairuza snatched her hand away. She did not like sitting in the back with Chinghiz, either. He kept finding excuses to touch her and it was irritating. She had wanted to sit next to her brother, but Pavel said he preferred the front seat and that had been that.

Part of it, she knew, was that Arshan needed to impress his friends. She could not imagine why; it wasn't even as though Pavel and Chinghiz had jobs—and there were plenty of people in *that* boat nowadays, now that the Russian economy had collapsed and taken the Kazakhstani one with it—but Arshan seemed to idolize them. She would never, she thought, understand boys.

"Anyway, what are you going to do—get out and walk?" Pavel continued.

"No," Fairuza muttered.

words are the only
things that truly live
forever. but if someone
is denied the power
of speech, can she truly
prove that she has lived?

"Stop complaining, then. Shut up and enjoy the ride."

Fairuza waited for Arshan to say, *Don't speak to my sister like that*, but he was silent. Frustrated, she huddled deeper into her coat and forced herself to bite back her angry words. There was no point in quarreling.

There was little enough to enjoy about this trip. If it had been daylight, and later in the year, Fairuza might have taken some pleasure in the journey. The road over the high steppe was beautiful, with long fronds of grass and wildflowers edging the narrow strip of tarmac. From here, the land swept down all the way to Tekheli, the mountains a blur of indigo shadow at the horizon's edge, merging into the long distances of the Chinese border. But now it was early January, blowing with snow, a long way past the year's best.

Arshan took a sharp turn, heading toward the network of roads that led to the villages and small farms. The Mercedes skidded. Fairuza heard ice crunch under the tires.

"Arshan! *Slow down!*"

But it was too late. Everything became dreamlike and blurred. She saw the road spinning beneath the car as it wheeled up and over, heard Chinghiz crying out beside her. She felt completely calm. She wondered who was screaming so loudly, why the girl was making such a fuss. Then she was somewhere warm and soft, back in bed in her dad's house and it had all been a dream.

She opened her eyes. The car was resting on its roof, half buried in the snow. She was lying outside on a bank, curled up in her heavy coat. There was the sharp, unpleasant smell of leaking gas, blackening the snow. It was only when she got up and stumbled down to the car that she realized it was not gas after all, but blood. She did not want to look inside the car. She stood there for what seemed like a long time, with her feet crunching on brittle snow and broken glass as she stamped mechanically up and down. At last, she made herself peer through the window. Chinghiz lay unmoving under the back seat. His mouth and eyes were open. He looked blank, not even surprised. Pavel was half out of the car and when she went around it, she saw that his chest had been crushed; the protruding bones were as pale as the snow. Fairuza's hand went to her mouth. Her thoughts were moving very slowly, as though time had started to stop. She thought: *Arshan was in the driver's seat. And there is a hole in the windscreen.* None of them had been wearing seatbelts—the buckles had long since broken. She walked all around the car, looking. Broken glass glittered diamond-bright in the drifts. There was no sign of Arshan. Fairuza went back to the road, somehow surprised to find it still stretching down toward the plain. The skid marks were like writing on the ice.

She could not find Arshan anywhere; he was nowhere to be seen. She searched and searched until it struck her that it was really very cold, and she should try to call for help. She forced herself to look in the dead boys' pockets and found a mobile phone. She rang her father's number, but she did not know what she said. She thought she heard him answer, but she was very tired and it struck her that by far the best thing to do was to sit down. There was a dim notion at the back of her mind that for some reason this was a bad idea, but she did not care. She sat in the snow, rubbing her eyes. She must have been crying, she thought, because the tears had frozen on her cheeks, but it did not feel cold any longer.

She glanced up and saw that there was a woman standing by the car. The woman was dressed in the traditional manner, with the high white headdress of an unmarried girl and leather boots. Fairuza saw a round face, cold as the moon. The woman said, in Kazakh: *I have taken him, just as they took my voice, my words.*

"What do you mean?" Fairuza asked, but the woman was no longer there, lost in a whirling gust of snow.

2

When she awoke, her grandmother was sitting by the side of the bed, reading a movie magazine. Fairuza opened her mouth, but only a croaking sound came out. Her grandmother dropped the magazine on the floor.

"Oh! You're awake." She clutched at Fairuza with tears in her eyes. "I'll go and get your mama—she's just gone to talk to the doctor."

"It's sunny," Fairuza said. It seemed very strange that it should have been night and winter so little time ago. There was a thorn pricking her hand. She looked down and saw an IV needle.

"Fairuza, that's the lights, not the sun. You're in the hospital. You've been unconscious for nearly a day. You were in an accident—"

—and it all came rushing back, the road and the night, and the car overturning. She struggled up from the coarse pillow.

"Arshan! Have they found him?"

But she could see from her grandmother's face that they had not.

"Maybe he was hurt, and wandered off," she said. "Maybe he's safe somewhere ..."

But the moment she said it, she knew how foolish this was. It had been so cold, and there was no shelter anywhere on the steppe. Then she remembered the woman.

"I saw someone," she said. "A woman, dressed in the old way. She

It was winter again,

said she'd taken him. Perhaps she lives up there, maybe she took him to a yurt ..."

But her grandmother's face was troubled and when Fairuza looked into her eyes, she saw only doubt.

"Just try to rest, dear. Don't you worry about anything."

"But—"

"You mustn't speak. You'll tire yourself out."

And indeed, she was suddenly overwhelmingly weary. She leaned back against the pillow and slept.

When she next woke, her grandmother had gone. The room was dim; she could hear other people mumbling in their sleep and shifting about. There was a single lamp at the end of the ward. A host of tiny shadows skittered up the wall and Fairuza caught her breath, but they were only cockroaches, perhaps drawn by the light. One of the other patients was moving about the ward, shuffling along the floor. Then she turned, and Fairuza saw the woman from the steppe road. She looked exactly the same. She carried with her a breath of cold and snow. She came to stand by the bed and stood looking down at Fairuza. Fairuza could see the white owl feathers that decorated her headdress, to protect the wearer from evil spirits.

"You will not find him," the woman said. She tilted her head back. "He is mine now; he no longer belongs to you."

"Who are you?" Fairuza breathed, but the woman only smiled, and it was a cruel smile.

"They are all mine," she said. "All the young men who took my voice away from me." Then she was gone. A white feather drifted down like a snowflake to rest on the hospital floor. In the morning, Fairuza thought it must have been a dream.

3

Her classmates were very kind to Fairuza when she went back to college and her language classes. They all told her that Arshan might yet be found; there were herders in the hills who lived in their yurts in lower pastures even in winter, and maybe one of these people had taken Arshan in. He might have lost his memory; it often happened, they said, to people affected by the cold. Fairuza knew they meant well, but every time she came close to believing them, she remembered the woman and her cold smile.

It was no use pretending that life was normal. Sometimes she thought it would have been easier if Arshan had actually died, but the thought made her feel so guilty that she stifled it. But if he had died, at least they

would *know*. At least they could all stop waiting for the day when her brother might come back, and then, perhaps, her mother might laugh again and her father stop drifting around the house as though he were no more than a ghost himself. She tried to talk about Arshan, but her mother would not listen and her father told her roughly to be quiet. Later, he apologized, but Fairuza said nothing more about her brother.

When the first thaw of spring came, however, she called the ambulance driver who had rescued her and asked if there was any chance of going back up onto the steppe. Perhaps, and this was a terrible thought, Arshan would be like so many of the people that the locals called "spring flowers," whose corpses were released by the snow and ice when winter began to depart.

The ambulance driver said that he would take her there himself. They drove in silence on a still March morning, with the first faintness of green spreading over the lower slopes. Most of the snow was still there on the heights, but when they reached the spot where the car had gone off the road, the drifts had melted. Fairuza got out of the ambulance driver's car and looked around her, shivering. Bare earth and thin edges of grass: no body, no bones.

"Let's go back," she said abruptly, and made her way down the slope to the car.

It was mid-afternoon when they got back to Taldy-Kurgan. Fairuza asked Mikhail to drop her off at the library. Her parents still talked about the days when Kazakhstan had been part of the Soviet Union; although it was not all that long ago, it seemed part of the far past to Fairuza, as distant as the time of khans and poets.

She walked slowly up the cracked stone path that led to the library doors, passing the empty plinth where a statue of Lenin had once stood. When she was a little girl, she remembered asking her mother whether Lenin was a librarian, because he was holding a book. They still teased her about it at home, but the statue had been taken down years ago now and never replaced. As she climbed the library steps, Fairuza could still feel the winter chill in her bones; it was good to get into the warm silence of the building. She went straight to the poetry section.

At first she thought there was nothing. The poetry shelves were filled with traditional works, both Russian and Kazakh. The section

the rocks like black bones under the snow.

"He can't just have vanished," she said, for the hundredth time.

"Do you know how long you were unconscious?" the driver, a stocky man named Mikhail Petrovich, asked.

"I've no idea."

"It can't have been very long; otherwise, quite frankly, you would have frozen to death. If your brother was thrown clear, perhaps concussed, he couldn't have walked very far before he collapsed." The driver touched her arm. "I'm sorry to be so direct. But it's better that we face the truth."

Fairuza nodded; she agreed, and she was beginning to think that anything was better than this terrible not-knowing. Together, they walked up the slope to the crest of the hill. There was nothing.

"If there was a body, we would see it," Mikhail said. "You said he was wearing a red jacket?"

"Yes, one of those puffy things. But it was red, I remember it clearly. We joked about it, how he was still a Communist. But he didn't have any interest in politics. He wanted to be a businessman." She felt the tears rise in her throat, choking her.

"It's a real mystery. Maybe someone found him on the road."

"But where would they take him? The nearest hospital's the one in Taldy-Kurgan, and he wasn't there. They wouldn't have driven him all the way to Almaty. I wondered whether someone might have taken him to a yurt."

"Not at this time of year, surely. They don't come up as high as this."

"I thought—"

"What would be the point? There's no grazing."

"I suppose not."

They walked along the ridge for a short distance, but found nothing, only a cairn of stones piled high on the rock.

"What's that?" Fairuza said.

"It's a monument. A grave."

"To a khan?" There were plenty of old graves around these parts, Fairuza knew, memorials dating back as far as Genghis's day.

"No, to a poetess. A woman named Gulnara who wanted to be an *akyn* in the 17th century, but the khan at that time was young and arrogant and wouldn't let a woman become a bard. She was supposed to have been very beautiful—they're all beautiful, though, in the old stories, aren't they?" Mikhail laughed. "They called her the Flower of Tekheli. She put a curse on the khan, on all young men, and then she died."

Fairuza thought of the woman, in her old-fashioned dress, and her skin began to crawl.

was dominated by the poet Abai; it was not a very wide selection. Surely her people had written more than this? Frustrated, Fairuza went in search of the librarian.

"There might be something in one of the collections, but I'm not sure," the woman said. "They didn't write much down in those days—it was an oral tradition."

"Something must have survived, though? Abai's work survived."

"But Abai was translated into Russian from the Kazakh, and he was relatively recent.... Let me go and look."

Fairuza sat down on a nearby bench to wait. The librarian took a long time, and she began to feel drowsy. From the corner of her eye, she saw an image begin to form against the institutional green paint of the library wall. It was the woman from the steppe, and this time her face was not arrogant beneath the white headdress, but sad. Fairuza looked up, but there was nothing there.

The librarian returned, holding a single book.

"It's in here. There's only one poem, and that isn't finished."

"Can I copy it?"

"I don't see any harm in that."

Fairuza handed over the money for the photocopying and found the single page bearing Gulnara's poem. It was a poem to the mountain of Tekheli itself, to the eagle's flight above the waterfalls. The last stanza was incomplete. Fairuza copied the poem, folded it into her pocket, and took it home.

That night, the poetess came to her in a dream.

"You spared me," Fairuza said, standing once more by the cairn on the high ridge. It was winter again, the rocks like black bones under the snow. "I could have died in the accident. But you took my brother. Why? Where is he?"

The poetess was no longer sad, but angry.

"He is young, and a man. It was reason enough. You are a woman, and I cannot kill one of my own kind."

"Why do you *want* to kill?" Fairuza asked. "I know that a young man wronged you, but—"

"Wronged?" The poetess turned on her. "If it had been rape, I could have borne it. Even banishment, I could have borne. But he took my *voice*. He stopped me from telling the poems, the old tales. I could not write—how would I have learned? But the poems, I took from my grandmother, and her grandmother before her. My brothers did not care—all they knew was horses. I would have passed the tales on, but the khan would not let me. And now everything is lost."

Continued on page 98

RESOURCES

By Julia H. West • Illustration by Michael Kerr

Dry grass rustled against Hallelujah Tuckett's legs as she squatted in the shade of a cotton tree. She wriggled her shoulders, wishing she could scratch where the sweat was trickling down. But she had better things to do with her hands. She wouldn't let a little itch stop her from learning the magic.

Tlakh, the Boon witch doctor, would dump her quick if she didn't pay attention. Tlakh made it clear he didn't care if she was an offworlder—she was just another apprentice to him. Halley was determined to be a good apprentice. She knew Tlakh's tales were magic—hadn't he cured her flu in about five minutes?

With the other apprentices—rusty-furred Pellag, Jhiweel of the golden eyes, and tiny Suftek—Halley watched taleweaver Tlakh's movements. The long, gray fingers of his left hand swooped toward his right, caught a loop of string, and pulled back. He tipped his hands so the apprentices could see. "Tchon."

"Tchon," Halley echoed with the apprentices, copying the movement with the red yarn looping her own hands. *A hammock,* she translated to herself. She followed as he bent his index fingers over a set of loops and twisted his hands. "Ekha troon, the rising sun."

Halley copied his every move, grunting with satisfaction when her completed string figure looked like Tlakh's. "Kazha mokee," said the taleweaver, and Halley thought *a water hole.* The figure looked like a round, deep pool—and she could change its depth by moving her index fingers.

IF THE LAWS OF PHYSICS ARE UNIVERSAL, WHO'S TO SAY THAT THE SAME DOESN'T HOLD TRUE FOR THE LAWS OF MAGIC?

While Tlakh helped Jhiweel, who kept twisting the string the wrong way around his hands, Halley, Pellag, and Suftek practiced the figure. When Tlakh was satisfied, he said, "Now my story." As his long fingers manipulated the string, with movements graceful as dancing, his story unfolded. "The hunter wakes in the dark, stretches and climbs out of his hammock. He is thirsty, so he goes out to fill the water basket. The sun rises as he walks toward the mountains. And there, in the plain, is the water hole, deep, full of cool water." Halley was glad his words were simple ones. She actually understood him.

At the story's end the apprentices sighed their appreciation. Halley never understood the point of Tlakh's stories, but she knew there was more to taleweaving than just stories.

The taleweaver dropped the loops from his fingers and returned the string to its place around his neck. "Now, Khallee," he told her in heavily accented English. "Look at our braids."

Pellag sidled up, her long nose twitching in nervousness, and gave Halley three braids, each carefully tied at the end and decorated with a bead, as Halley had shown them. As Halley turned them, checking for how tightly and evenly the braids were made, the apprentices crowded close, breath whistling between their teeth in excitement. "This one's too loose—see how the strands separate? The other two look fine."

"Do you think you could braid skekki fur?" asked Tlakh. "To show us how you get braids all over?"

"I'll try." Halley didn't like teaching, but it was worth it for the magic. Shy Suftek ran out into the compound, caught one of the long-haired beasts, and brought it to Halley. The skekki settled into her lap, making comfortable heh-heh noises, and she began combing the tangles from its fur.

"Do you tell a tale as you braid?" asked Tlakh, watching intently as she separated out strands.

"Uh, yeah, sure." Since he expected it, Halley began one of the stories her mama used to tell her, changing it a little for the Boons. "My mama, Glory, used to tell this tale. Ol' man, uh, wererabbit wanted a wife. So he went to a hunter's camp while the hunter was away and asked his wife to come live with him. 'I've got a great pot, full of khip roots and meat every day.' The wife was hungry, so she went away with ol' man wererabbit." As Halley talked her fingers flew, making a braid in the animal's long fur, tying off the braid with colored string and a bead, and starting another.

"But after a day in ol' man wererabbit's den, she saw no great pot, and got only grass to eat. She knew she'd made a bad mistake. But she was far from her band's territory, and didn't know how to get back to the camp. So she said to ol' man wererabbit, 'You've shared your den and your food. Come to my camp, and I'll make dinner.' Ol' man wererabbit eagerly ran back to the camp, and the woman followed. 'Gather wood while I dig khip,' she said, and ol' man wererabbit did. She filled her pot with water, and when ol' man wererabbit came back she popped him in the pot, sealed it with ghatt sap and leaves, and built a fire under it. When her man came back from hunting she told him she'd caught wererabbit for dinner, and he never knew what happened."

Half the skekki's fur was braided now, and she stopped and looked up at Tlakh. He stared at the braids, his long nose twitching. "You do this with all the hair on a khuman's head?" he asked.

Halley nodded, forgetting that didn't mean "yes" for the Boons, and the bells and beads in her braided hair clicked and jingled together. "Yes."

This seemed to puzzle Tlakh. "Your strings are different and your tales are different. I do not yet understand khuman taleweavers."

Tlakh lifted his hands, signaling an end to the lesson. "We will finish the braids, and when you come back you can tell us if we did well." The apprentices covered their faces with their hands and backed off.

Tlakh put one of his long-fingered gray hands on her shoulder and drew her away from the knot of apprentices. She followed the taleweaver through the dusty courtyard, dodging skekki, into a hut half hidden in the cotton tree grove. The air was cooler there, but it was dark and a little stuffy, and smelled of spices and dung.

"Khallee, some of the Eblekh Zai—not of Ghuxi Band—are unhappy that we learn from each other." Tlakh rubbed his hands together, back and forth. "You must stay away for a time."

"But I want to learn the tales!" Halley protested. *And the magic*, she thought but didn't say. "You said you'd show me how to make a proper string."

Tlakh sat carefully on the pounded-earth floor and fumbled in a pouch that hung from his belt. "I have not taught you enough yet. But you can practice. Collect dead fibers like these." He brought out a handful of what looked like fur.

"YOUR STRINGS ARE DIFFERENT AND YOUR TALES ARE DIFFERENT. I DO NOT YET UNDERSTAND KHUMAN WEAVERS."

"OK," she said, "I'll collect dead fibers." She squatted in front of him, watching his fingers.

"Roll them against your hip, and keep adding more fibers." As she watched, squinting in the dim light, a long piece of twine grew under his fingers against the smooth leather of his shorts. His fingers moved almost too quickly, feeding in the bits of fur.

"Can I try with some of yours?" she asked, not sure she could make string like that.

The twine dropped to the floor when he hesitated. Quickly, Halley bent and picked it up. She rolled it on her hip; the tiny hairs prickled against her palm.

Tlakh's nose quivered, and his hand moved forward, as if to snatch the string back from her.

"I add more fiber to the end?" she asked, and held her hand out to the taleweaver.

He stared at her for a moment, then pressed a wad of fur into her

hand. "Add it a little at a time; it must twist in with the rest of the string."

Halley's end of the twine was lumpy, but held when she pulled on it. "I will practice."

Tlakh smoothed his heavy mane and turned away. "Be careful. I have not taught you enough."

Halley paused where the dirt track met the paved starport road to pat dust from her legs and give the small of her back a good scratch. Behind her, heat shimmered from the plains and the gray-green bushes. Ahead, sun glinted off the polarized windows of the Grayplain Port Tower and the shiny plastic sides of businesses and homes.

Clean, bright-colored shops lined the starport's broad avenues. The contrast with the filthy, crowded streets of Asher City, back on Tufar where Halley grew up, had enchanted her the first day. But that was before she realized that *nothing* ever happened in Midway's Grayplain starport.

Halley wrinkled her nose at the ozone and chemical smells wafting out the door of Trisha's Hair Care as she entered, but welcomed the air conditioning.

Round, comfortable Trisha looked frazzled today. She was busy rolling a perm and called, "Good timin', Halley. 'Most everybody called in sick and that guy wants cornrows." She pointed at a man lounging in one of the waiting chairs, poking idly at the newsscreen.

"Late in the day for that," said Halley. "Does he know how long it takes? Might not be time."

"So ask him. Looks like he's got heavy pockets; prob'ly tip good. And you're fast."

Worth a try. The quicker she earned money, the sooner she was off this planet. Halley strode over. "You the guy who wants cornrows?" She looked at his shoulder-length hair. "It takes a long time."

"I've got time," the man said. "I owe myself something nice. I've been going crazy. You wouldn't believe how busy Starport Authority offices have been, with half the personnel out sick. Give me the works. I like beads; got glass ones?"

Halley washed the man's hair, thinking, *You got it good in the 'Thority offices, brother, even if you are busy now. Bet you make ten times what I do.* She parted out three strands and began to braid. "Lotta sickness there, huh? Must be the season. We were down to skeleton crews at my other job this morning."

"Yeah, and my boss is an ogre. Sheela DeGraff may look and talk good on the newsfeeds, but in real life ... whew! When she wants something *now*, it doesn't matter *who's* out sick."

Several hours later Trisha walked by and tapped her arm. "Like we don't got enough trouble already, Halley, there's one of your Boon friends hanging around outside."

Halley began another braid, her fingers never pausing as she craned her neck to see out the door. Humans in the starport called the natives "Boons" because they looked a bit like Earth baboons. The one squatting just outside the door was skinny, his iron-gray mane unkempt. Halley didn't know him; his cheek tattoo was three green triangles, tip to tip. Tlakh's band all had two red circles, like teardrops, tattooed beneath their eyes.

Boons didn't often come into the human starport. Some of the bands wanted the offworld imports, others barely accepted the humans' presence, and a few bands plain hated offworlders. But none of the Boons seemed comfortable in the plastic-and-steel environs of the starport.

"I've been out with Ms. DeGraff to see some Boons in their compounds," the man said. "It's incredible that they choose to live in such primitive conditions."

Halley grunted. She'd found that no one on Midway but her anthropologist friend shared her fascination with the Boons.

When Halley finished the man's braids, it was closing time. She stepped back to admire her handiwork. "Take a look," she told the Authority employee, handing him a mirror.

He inspected his hair, turning this way and that so light flashed off the glass beads on the braid ends. "Looks great!" He pressed a five-mark into her hand, flipped his card into and out of the payment slot in the front counter, and left.

One five-mark more toward leaving this place, she thought.

Trisha followed him to the door and locked it behind him, then turned to face the shop, empty but for staff. "Listen, folks," she said to the beauticians, who were sweeping up cut hair and putting away bottles of shampoo. "This is bad. Starport Authority is shutting the shop down to check us out. Too many of the clients are getting sick—stomachaches, headaches, stuff like that—and 'Thority wants to know why."

"What'll we do?"

"We run a clean shop!" the staff protested. Halley wondered if the guy whose hair she'd braided had been here to check out the shop. She almost wished she'd tossed his five-mark back at him, but that would be stupid. She needed every mark—especially if Trisha's place closed down. Without the extra money she earned here, she'd be stuck on Midway forever. She didn't make enough as a forklift driver to pay for a ticket offworld.

"I'll call you when I find out more. I'll prob'ly be here all day tomorrow, showin' guys around while they take samples for their tests."

Halley stood outside the door for a long time, staring at magenta and blue, pink and turquoise shops without seeing them. People getting sick after coming to Trisha's? Why would such a thing happen?

She shook her head, heard the click-click of the beads in her hair. Tlakh would know what to do. No matter what Sarah, her anthropologist friend, thought, he wasn't just a storyteller, and his stories and string figures were more than entertainment. He'd cured her flu, just three sendays ago.

The Meng Brothers Storage and Transfer warehouse echoed with early morning footsteps. Halley yawned and looked at the schedule posted on the break room's wall. A big cargo ship hung in orbit over Midway, and the first shuttle load of goods should already have arrived. Halley dropped her lunch sack into her locker and opened the door into the main warehouse.

A babble of uneasy conversation washed through the door, echoing from the warehouse's high ceiling. Halley's fellow workers milled around, gesturing at empty docks and sealed bay doors. Halley elbowed her way through the crowd to join a knot of workers clustered near the bay door. A notice taped to the door read, "As of 0600 all space traffic will cease due to planetwide quarantine. Orders of Grayplain Starport Authority."

"What the ... ?" She turned to her nearest neighbor, skinny Floyd Ross. "What's the story on this?"

"Plague's what I heard."

"Plague!" Halley repeated. "I don't believe it." But the authorities had closed down Trisha's Hair Care.

"Twenty people called in sick yesterday, thirty-three today," said Floyd. "Same thing happening all over town. My wife stayed home from work with a headache and a fever, and both my kids were throwing up this morning." Worry creased his forehead, and he licked his lips again and again. "Couldn't get a doctor appointment, and no one can get in the clinic door, it's so crowded. Don't that make you believe?"

"So there's flu going around. That's not a plague. I was sick a few weeks ago, but I'm fine now...." She remembered how Tlakh had chosen carefully from among the strings around his neck, how he had recited one of his pointless stories and formed a string figure. Instantly her nose had stopped running, her sinuses had cleared, and before she left the taleweaver's compound all symptoms were gone. That was when she started believing that Tlakh actually worked magic.

She asked Floyd, "Anybody die?"

"Two or three," he said. "And some people have been sick for a week or so now, delirious or in a coma."

The babble of conversation hushed, and Halley turned to see the hardwood door at the back of the warehouse, the one that led into the office complex, open. A man in a crisply starched tunic, one of the Management bozos, stood with his hand on the lockplate as if to assure himself he could leave quickly. He cleared his throat and said, "I, uh, see you've found the notice."

A growl of comment filled the warehouse. "Damn right!"

"What's goin' on?"

"*Is* it plague?"

The guy waited, pulling nervously at his lower lip, until the noise calmed down. "Due to the inordinately high number of cases of serious illness, Starport Authority has closed the port and an investigation is under way. There must be no possibility of an infectious agent being transmitted off the planet by spacers contracting the illness. All ships that have left the planet within the last two weeks have been contacted by overspace comm and will be placed in quarantine upon arrival at their destinations." The Management guy pulled at his collar as if it were too tight, his eyes darting from face to face.

Halley's fellow workers shuffled their feet and muttered to themselves. Finally one spoke up. "So what we gonna do? You gonna lay us all off? We gotta eat."

"Yeah."

"You said it, man."

The Management guy cleared his throat. "Meng Brothers Storage and Transfer will see to it that you and your families are cared for. Company doctors will open a clinic in the break room and you will be allowed to draw against future earnings if you need cash before the quarantine is lifted."

"All right!"

"Not too bad."

"Maybe old man Meng got a heart after all." That might make the other workers happy, but Halley knew what it meant. No pay until another ship came in, and any money they drew from Meng Brothers would put them that much further in debt. She'd indentured with Meng Brothers for three years to get off that scum-hole she used to live on—but she didn't want to stay here a day longer than those three years.

"Go home now," said the Management guy. "The clinic will open at about fifteen this afternoon."

A hullabaloo of questions met this statement, but the Management bozo had already slipped back through the heavy door to the safety of the Meng Brothers offices.

"I'm not goin' home," said Floyd, still standing beside Halley. "I'm gonna call Mina and have her bring the kids, and be here when that clinic opens." Others must have had the same idea; the line for the phone stretched out of the break room.

"You do that," said Halley. "I'm leavin'." No job, no work at Trisha's. Maybe she could find spacers, trapped on this dustball by the quarantine, who wanted their hair done. Or maybe Tlakh would talk to her, even though his people didn't like her taking magic lessons from him. He'd be mighty interested in a plague that had half the humans in the starport down sick.

The street outside the warehouse was nearly empty. Heat shimmers danced over the pavement, and the spacers arguing on the corner wore nothing but shorts. Halley started down the alley between Meng Brothers' warehouse and Nguyen Manufacturing's offices, and nearly tripped over the Boon crouching in the shadows. "Hey!" she said, rummaging through her mind for something to say in his language.

The Boon started to run, in that odd hunched-over way they had. The three-triangle cheek tattoo, and the broad scar on his shoulder, made him pretty recognizable. He was the Boon who'd been outside at Trisha's.

He got something to hide? Halley thought. This would be a good excuse to go see Tlakh—maybe. He'd have an idea why this guy was following her, or watching her, or whatever he was doing.

TWO APPRENTICES STARED AT HALLEY FROM the intertwined branches of the ghatt tree walls of Tlakh's compound. The spicy smell from leaves they crushed wafted down to her as she stood impatiently waiting for the gate to open. She listened to the muted chatter of voices and "heh-heh-heh" of the skekki, wondering if Tlakh would ignore her, leave her standing out here. *He knows I wouldn't come here except for a good reason.*

Finally, she heard thongs unwind, and the gate swung toward her. Tlakh himself stood framed in the entranceway, his long nose quivering.

"Uh, Tlakh—hey, I know you don't want me back so soon, but I've gotta ask you something." Halley didn't want to spend a lot of time on welcomes.

"Khallee, what is it you wish to know?" Tlakh could be equally blunt. He fingered the grubby strings around his neck.

"Two things, actually. First, have you heard about the sickness in the starport? Nobody can come or go in the skyships."

Tlakh's fingers stilled, twined in the strings. He drew air through his teeth in a prolonged hiss, then let it out explosively. "Khallee, this could be a trouble between your people and my people."

"You think, even though all the docs say we can't pass germs back and forth, that we might? I mean, could we have caught this from you—or could we pass it to you?"

"It is not that, Khallee." He paused, sorted through his strings, then pulled one over his head and threaded it between his fingers.

"You know what this is then?" As usual when she came out into the plains to see Tlakh, she was sweating in the heat. A droplet trickled down her forehead, but she ignored it, intent on Tlakh's answer.

"You have not *caught* it from us," he answered, his eyes intent on the figure he formed. His fingers flashed through the moves so quickly Halley could hardly follow them, much less recognize and name them. He pulled his hands apart, displayed between them a completed figure she had never seen before—a network of diamonds. After gazing at it for a few seconds, he dropped the strings from his outside thumbs and pulled gently. The figure disintegrated into a single loop around his hands.

He placed the string around his neck and looked at Halley. "You had a second question?"

"Uh, yeah." She squatted in the dirt, found a twig, and drew the triangle pattern she had seen on the scruffy Boon's face. "One of your people—from another band—has been watching me in the starport. He had this cheekmark."

"Green triangles?" asked Tlakh, squatting and pushing his head forward at an angle a human neck could never duplicate.

"Yes. He had a wide scar on one shoulder, like something had burned all the hair off."

Tlakh tipped one hand from side to side, the Boon equivalent of nodding. He stood abruptly and grasped Halley's hand. "Come, I will teach you."

Halley followed Tlakh quietly, confused. She scuffed through the dust into the cotton tree grove in the center of the compound, trying not to trip on the long-haired skekki scampering underfoot, and very aware of Boons, young and old, staring at her from their huts and hammocks. The taleweaver took her to his hut and motioned for her to sit on a low, leather stool.

"Have you practiced making strings with dead fibers?" Tlakh asked, squatting before her on the hard-packed dirt.

She had used cuttings swept from the floor at Trisha's. Making string must be trickier than it looked. "I practiced, but my strings turned out full of thick and thin spots, and pulled apart when I tried to make figures."

"Always practice with dead fiber. Use living fiber only for the tales you wish to make real."

The intensity of his words, spoken carefully in English, told Halley that this was *important*. But so far she couldn't figure out what the importance was. She went over his words in her mind, setting them and their tone so she could ponder them later. Now if only she knew what dead and living fibers were!

"I have taught you easy tales, ones an apprentice can do no harm with. I cannot give you stories of great power, but as you are a khuman taleweaver, and you have shared your weavings with me, I will give you weavings that could help you."

He's trying to tell me something without coming right out and saying it, thought Halley. *Or else he just can't figure out how to say it in English.* She wished she could understand him better, and read his body language.

Tlakh sorted through the strings around his neck, pulled one grubbier than the rest over his head. He quickly arranged it in the most common opening, tchon or "the hammock," and looked at her expectantly. She searched through her jumpsuit pockets until she found the old piece of red yarn she used to practice string figures, and followed his lead.

"This is a hunting tale," he began. "The hunter leaves her hammock and wanders through the plains." He dropped the string from one hand, took it up again in a different pattern. "She looks into wererabbit dens, climbs ghatt trees, and goes up and down hills." She copied his complicated actions, hampered by the fact that her pinky fingers were less flexible than his far thumbs. "Finally she gets to the mountains, and there she finds her prey." Halley had to take loops of string off her fingers with her teeth to "get to the mountains."

Tlakh extended his hands for her to view his final product—three diamonds linked at the points, framed by more string. He smiled. "Now catch your prey."

Halley stared at the figure, her brow furrowed. Her figure wasn't nearly as even as his. Catch her prey?

"Put your string down and I will show you."

She slipped the string off her fingers, carefully straightening it.

"Put your hand through the middle mountain."

She did, and he dropped the strings from one hand and pulled them tight around her wrist. "Caught!"

Halley laughed. It was a child's trick, his hunting tale. She freed her hand from his string, took hers up again. Slowly, they went through the motions, the tale. "Now you catch me!" said Tlakh.

Halley was right-handed; she dropped the strings from her right hand. They slithered across Tlakh's wrist, and he stood free, smiling at her. "What's the trick?" she said, even more mystified.

"Watch closely, Khallee." He whipped through the figure again, and she placed her wrist in the central diamond. He loosed the strings from his *left* hand, and trapped her again. "Do you see?"

"I do." She slowly went through the figure, came up with diamonds. Tlakh put his hand within her loop, she released, and her string closed around his wrist.

"The power of a living string will help you catch your prey. See, I hunt lizard." He took a dried lizard claw from the little pouch at his waist, handed it to her, and formed the figure. She pushed the claw through the center diamond, and he caught it with the string. "To hunt wererabbits, I use their fur or bones. It is stronger if the string is animal, not plant. Do you see?"

She stared at the taleweaver, breathing in little gasps. "Yes, I see. I see!" The truth of it was blinding. What did Sarah, the old anthropologist, call this? Never mind its name, but to catch a rat, use something from the rat. Living string—could that be a string made from the fur or hair of a living creature? Her yarn was polyester—never living, and therefore safe for practice. But what would have happened had she used those strings she tried to make out of hair swept off Trisha's floor? That was "living" hair.

No wonder her cornrows fascinated the Boons. Wouldn't hair still attached to a person be even more alive than cut hair?

Tlakh took her hands between his. "What do you use for power, khuman taleweaver?"

She didn't know where to get power—she still didn't have it all figured out. She gaped at him, her mind racing.

"You have few power sources in your skyship compound," he continued when she could not answer. "Do not use up your own energy."

My own energy. Make a string from my own hair? Maybe I could braid something, make it long but thin enough.

Tlakh loosed her hands, sat back on his haunches, and formed the hammock. "How many tales can you learn today?" His fingers flashed through a figure, his lips moving as he watched the string. "I can show you well-being, healing of stomach ills, the healing I did when you came to me sick that time."

"Yes, the healing. That would be good." She picked her string out of the dirt, formed the hammock. And something came together in her head from the ideas and knowledge swirling there. "You only heal, right? You never do this to, like, *give* people stomachaches or stuffy noses. *You* would never do that."

Tlakh caught her gaze with his. His eyes, luminous like an alley cat's, bored into hers. "No, *I* would never do such a thing. We proper taleweavers would not do such a thing."

"Show me healing, then."

The phone light blinked in Halley's dark apartment when she got home. The message, from Trisha, said, "Hey, Halley, the powers-that-be decided the shop was OK, since the whole starport's down sick. We'll be open tomorrow, if you want work."

Hmmm. Halley wanted the money to add to her off-this-boring-rock fund, but she was more interested in the puzzle of Tlakh's magic. The *stories* aren't important, like Sarah the anthropologist thinks, it's the string figures. And just as important is what the string is made of. Maybe, Trisha, it *is* your shop causing the sickness. No *proper* taleweaver would make people sick—but what about an improper one? A scruffy one, with triangle cheekmark and a big scar on his shoulder?

Halley dug through her junk drawer and found a cord to replace her filthy, unraveling piece of yarn. While the cooker heated her dinner she ran through the healing figures until her fingers moved almost as smoothly as Tlakh's. She practiced the hunting figure, taking a spoon in her mouth and pushing it through the center diamond. She didn't want to forget the figures while she decided how to use her knowledge.

Few customers showed up at Trisha's the next day. They were subdued, and all talk was of the starport closing and the quarantine. But there weren't many beauticians, either, so Halley was busy.

After her stomach had cursed her out for hours, she finally went to the back room to heat her lunch. She sat at the little table, eating rubbery reheated wererabbit, and stared out the window. She could see the corner of 5th and Plainview Ave., but there wasn't much scooter traffic. The back door of Poczwardowski's Bagels opened, and a boy carried a sack of garbage out to the public waste slot at the end of the alley.

The boy went back into the bagel shop, and a gray figure rose out of the shadows in the back of the alley to poke a long hairy arm into the waste slot. It was Halley's old "friend," the Boon with the triangle cheekmark.

Halley eased out of her chair and touched the door's lockplate. The door opened silently, and she stepped into the street, between the Boon and the alley's opening. "What do you think you're doing?" she asked.

The Boon whipped around, darting toward her faster than she had expected. "Hey!" She snatched at his arm as he passed. "I need to talk to you!"

He pulled away violently, knocking her off balance, and ran. She landed hard on her butt, her breath whooshing out. When she scrambled to her feet and ran out of the alley, he was gone.

"Damn." Halley opened her clenched fist, looked at the few long hairs clutched there. Hairs. She reentered the alley and inspected the waste slot. More gray hairs clung to the lip of the slot, where he had pulled his arm out quickly. She gathered them with a grim smile. She had become a hunter, and now she knew her prey.

As she walked home that evening, her smile was gone. She needed a string of living fiber to tap this planet's power. She didn't want to cut her own hair; besides, Tlakh had warned her against that. He had said plant fiber was usable, though not as strong—but what would living plant fiber be?

Surely the taleweavers had a source of plant fiber. What? She stared unseeing at the bright pastels of the shops around her as she strode home.

In the residential areas, the colorful wall panels of houses were interspersed with the gray-green of native foliage. Here were plants, but what could she use to make a string? Not leaves or flowers, and if the Boons had some way to use the bark, she had no idea what it was.

She paused beneath the sketchy shade of a young cotton tree. Cotton trees. The well-protected center of Tlakh's compound was full of them. Of course! Their cottony seedpods were harvested every year. In fact, Halley had a cushion on her bed filled with the fluffy "cotton." She'd made it herself, with cotton harvested from the tree behind her apartment building.

She ran the rest of the way home, burst into her apartment, and grabbed the cushion off her bed. After she wrenched the stitches open, she pulled out the soft cotton; it clung together in long strands. She tried rolling it on her thigh and it twined easily into a string. She added more fiber, rolling it in, trying to keep it smooth so it would be strong enough to make figures. No time to get fancy. "Triangles" might be long gone, scared away when she'd recognized him.

How dare that slime make everybody sick! If Tlakh were not her friend, hadn't been willing to teach her the Boon language and, later, the taleweaving, she'd think the Boons were out to get humans. But Tlakh *had* said some of his people didn't like him teaching her. Was Triangles one of them?

Finally, about two meters of string held when she tugged on it. She bound the ends together and threaded it between her fingers. It was rather too soft, hard to use. But it held.

She pushed the string into her pocket, palmed the door open, and ran out into the quiet evening street. She'd try it at Trisha's, where he'd been at least twice before.

The back door recognized her palm, even though the shop was closed and dark. She pushed it open and left it, then dragged a chair over to where she could see out, but no one entering the alley could see her.

She lay the Boon's hairs, tied with a bit of thread, on the edge of the table. The cotton tree string clung to her fingers but she formed the hammock, then dropped the string from one hand. "It's early morning, and I jump out of my hammock. I'm looking for Triangles, but he's not in my compound. I wander through the plains, but can't find him. He's not hiding in wererabbit dens. I find a stand of ghatt trees, but he's not in their twisty branches. Up and down the hills I search, but don't see him." Halley pulled loops over her fingers with her teeth; fibers escaping the string tickled her upper lip and she nearly sneezed. "Long past breakfast, long past lunch, tired and hungry, I get to the mountains. And there he IS." She coaxed the string into the final pattern of three joined diamonds, picked up the little bunch of hair with her teeth, and poked it through the middle diamond. She released the strings from her left hand and coaxed the soft fibers down around the Boon's hair, tight. "CAUGHT."

She wondered how long it took to work. Give him at least a half hour—it took her that long to walk to Tlakh's compound. In the meantime, it wouldn't hurt to try the figure again. Tlakh had said the magic of plant fibers wasn't very strong.

"Caught!" Halley completed the figure for at least the millionth time. It was full dark out, and the only things she'd seen for hours were the lights of occasional scooters. Her shoulders ached, her hands were sore. What had ever made her think *she* could work Boon magic? So Tlakh thought her a taleweaver? Maybe, because she braided hair, he'd mistaken her for someone who knew something special.

Her stomach growled, and she dropped the string to the table. "I hope there's something to eat in the fridge," she muttered. She palmed the refrigerator door, peered into the dimly lit confines. Pickles—they wouldn't make much of a dinner. Bread—moldy.

A scuffling noise outside the door brought her upright, her night sight destroyed by the refrigerator light. She closed the fridge and felt her way along the wall. Slowly, her sight returned.

Skills honed by years in the slums of Tufar came in handy now. As the figure stepped hesitantly through the door, she grabbed him, flipped him, and pinned him to the floor.

His wrists and arms were covered with wiry hair. It was a Boon, but was it Triangles? She couldn't tell—he struggled too hard for her to let go of his hands and feel for the scar. Halley knelt on his shoulders to hold him down while she reached for the scissors she'd left on the table.

HOW COULD A WAREHOUSE WORKER MAKE AN ALIEN MAGICIAN STOP WHAT SHE WAS DOING?

The Boon stopped struggling as soon as she snipped the first handful of hair from the back of his head. He moaned and went limp. *I guessed right,* she thought. *He's like that guy Mama tells about—Samson.* She slid the scissors along his head and sheared more of his scruffy mane. As he whimpered, she touched his shoulder, felt the broad scar there. She had done it, she had drawn Triangles to her with Boon magic.

"Now I have your hair and I know what to do with it," she said in badly accented Boon. "Will you tell me about the sickness my people suffer?"

He gabbled something, too quickly for her to understand.

"You've been in the starport a lot; I bet you understand English," Halley said. "I'm Hallelujah Tuckett, and I'm a human taleweaver. What's your name?"

"I am Gezzet," said the Boon. He started to struggle again.

"Hold still so I don't hurt you, Gezzet. Now tell me, why are you making my people sick?"

Gezzet was smaller than Halley, but he heaved himself upward, trying to fling her off. She dropped the scissors and clutched what long hair was left in his mane. She tried to grab his wrist, pull his arm behind him to hold him down, but he managed to get to his primary knees with her still astride his back. He lurched forward, and she conked her head on the table.

"Ow!" She scrambled for a better grip on his arm, but he jerked away, knocked her over, and surged to his feet. He was out the door before she could grab the back of his legs. She'd never find him in the dark.

Halley rubbed her sore forehead, then got up and closed the door. She looked at the cotton tree fiber string, then at the pile of Boon hair. Should she try again, or was this enough?

HALLEY SPENT THE REST OF THE NIGHT TRYING TO roll a string from Gezzet's hair, the way Tlakh had showed her. The cotton tree fiber had been easy, but the Boon's coarse hair did not cling together.

Maybe braiding would work better. Just use the longest stuff, hold it with a hair clip, and add hair in all the time, like French braids. Once it was long enough, she could tie it around a chair leg, and get a really small, tight braid. Would there be enough?

The greasy, rank-smelling hair would not cooperate. This wasn't like doing hair at Trisha's, where she had … wait a minute! She could use setting gel to stick the hairs together.

Halley blinked, eyes gritty with lack of sleep, when a ray of sunlight filtered into her room. Her shoulders burned with tension, but she had finished two meters of braid. She sealed the rest of the hair into a plastic bag labeled "Triangles," then bound the ends together and formed the hammock between her hands. The hair string was oddly springy, reluctant to form figures. She didn't want to use it wrong; didn't know *what* to do with it, truth to tell.

After a hot, dusty walk to and from Tlakh's compound, where she talked to the taleweaver, Halley stopped at Trisha's. Gezzet crouched in the alley behind the shop.

Halley halted, blocking his way. She was bigger than he, but last night he had shown unexpected strength. What could he want with her now?

"Zhettal talk you," Gezzet said, rising and stepping forward.

"Who's Zhettal?" She raised her hands between them, and he backed into the shadow of the bagel shop.

"Taleweaver Fekho Band."

"Does he want me to come with you to his compound? I'm warning you, I've given your hair to a taleweaver who knows what to do with it, so if anything happens to me...."

The Boon's gray skin blanched, and he collapsed at her feet. "I apprentice Zhettal. Hold my power you."

"Oh, get up. I'm not gonna hurt you. Just take me to Zhettal."

Gezzet led Halley out of Grayplain's shopping district, skirting the execs' walled estates on the west edge of town rather than going south through the tenements, as she did to get to Tlakh's. So Gezzet's not the rogue taleweaver, Halley thought. She was a little nervous to go alone to Zhettal's compound. A Boon willing to make a whole starport full of humans sick might not care if one forklift driver disappeared into his compound, never to be seen again. Her hold over Gezzet better be enough to keep her safe.

After a ten-minute walk into the plain they came to a compound. The ghatt trees forming its walls were huge, their branches so intertwined that Halley wondered how the guards found a way through them. The smell of their leaves, in Midway's hot sun, was almost overpowering.

Zhettal's family and apprentices stared at Halley as she followed Gezzet into the compound. Zhettal's hut was in the middle of a cotton tree grove. Was that the usual place for a taleweaver? He—no, she—stood in the doorway, a tall Boon, skin wrinkled, hair almost white. She had many more strings around her neck than Tlakh carried.

Halley felt a moment of panic. What could she say to this woman? How could a warehouse worker make an alien magician stop what she was doing? Halley didn't even know if the Boon spoke English, and her own knowledge of Boon was pretty meager.

Be bold, Tuckett, she told herself. *Put her on the defensive.* "Are you Zhettal?" she asked the old Boon.

"I am Zhettal, taleweaver to Fekho Band. Your name, khuman?" Her eyes met Halley's; she was exactly Halley's height. And she spoke English as well as Tlakh did.

"I am Hallelujah Tuckett, a human taleweaver." Halley had only two strings around her neck—her practice cord and the one she'd twisted of cotton tree fiber. But she would not let Zhettal intimidate her. Here she was *the* human taleweaver, not a forklift driver or Glory's youngest kid. "I've come to tell you to stop making the humans sick. I know what you're doing, and I want you to stop *now.*"

Zhettal continued to stare into her eyes, but Halley wouldn't let the old woman make her nervous. "Come into my hut, Tuckett," said Zhettal. "I have talked to many khumans, but none of them carried strings. Perhaps *you* will understand my problem."

Her hut was larger and cooler than Tlakh's, but just as bare. Zhettal squatted in the packed dirt, and Halley sat cross-legged, facing her. "My tale is short," began Zhettal. "I do not welcome khumans to our land, but wish them no ill. Some of my people like the things you give us. Some fear your skyships, and say you will drive us to the mountains, away from our fields. At first I told them this could not be, but then khumans came to the elders. They wanted our fallow fields, to make your compound bigger. Our chieftain allowed this. But now khumans want more. They want my compound." The Boon fingered the strings around her neck and her nose twitched.

"My compound has been here four generations," continued Zhettal. "My cotton trees are strong. I can move my animals. My family can build new huts and hang new hammocks. But my cotton trees keep Fekho Band's crops healthy. You are a taleweaver, you understand."

A breeze whispered through the leafy canopy outside the hut, and Halley imagined bulldozers pushing the trees over. Of course. Plant strings—living fiber—for plant magic. Somehow it all worked together, and Zhettal's trees were more valuable to her and her band than anything humans could give her.

"I understand."

Zhettal twisted her hands in the strings around her neck. "I have said no and no and no, but still they come, saying they will give us more things. But what good are *things* if the crops fail and my band starves?"

"Did you tell them this?" asked Halley.

The Boon tipped one white-haired hand. "Many times."

"So you sent Gezzet into the starport to find human hair, to use it against us?"

"I did it to make you khumans go away. No one listened, and I feared when I said no too many times they would stop asking and

destroy my compound anyway."

"So you don't hate us, you just want to keep your compound safe?" Halley had a glimmering of an idea. "I think I can help you. But you must work with me."

Zhettal's taut back relaxed, and Halley knew the Boon had been as nervous as she. "Can *you* save my compound? They come back in four days for my answer."

"I'll do what I can." Halley took her practice string from around her neck. "But you'll have to teach me some new figures, for this to work."

When Halley got to Trisha's shop late the next morning, it was empty of all but restless beauticians. "Business not too good?" Halley asked.

Trisha flopped into one of the chairs. "This quarantine's gonna ruin my business. Nobody wants to spend money on their hair when people are dyin' like roaches and they got no work."

"Hey, I got an idea. How about we do a 'quarantine special,' and give people a discount? Something's better than nothing, right?" Halley looked around at the other beauticians, who nodded but looked dubious.

"OK," said Trisha, "but we can't afford to advertise, not now. A sign in the window would be OK, but... ."

"If you'll let me use customer records, I'll do it myself. I'll just pick the rich ones—the ones this quarantine's not hurting."

Trisha's round pink face lit in a smile. "That's the spirit. Catch the Management and 'Thority types. They're not paying wages now. They can afford it."

Halley had learned a few things back on Tufar, before she got away from the squalor of Asher City. She could plant a nice little ad, not too flashy, in selected clients' newsfeeds. A little color, to make them notice it, and just the right message. Saving money, yeah, something about boredom? No. The word "healthy," since everyone is hyped about sickness.

Business picked up the next day. Although she spent most of her time making cornrows, Halley helped the other beauticians, too—mostly by sweeping up hair after the half-price haircuts. None of the long strands made their way into the waste slot out back, though—Halley sorted the hair neatly into plastic bags and hid it in her locker.

Short ends of hair covered the carpet in Halley's room, and more of it poked out of the bags piled on the bed. Halley sat cross-legged on the floor, dabbing setting gel on the long strands of wavy blonde hair she was braiding. This was her prize—hair from Starport Authority's second-in-command, Sheela DeGraff. If she could sway DeGraff ...

Finally she had a usable string. It was sleek and shiny, easier to work than the string she had made from Gezzet's hair. She threaded it over her hands, formed the hammock, and slowly began a story as she formed a figure.

"Zhettal gets out of her hammock one morning, stretches, and looks toward the sun. She looks past the cotton trees in the middle of her compound, past the ghatt trees surrounding her compound, to the khuman skyship compound." The figure was one of many diamonds—like the one Tlakh had made once. She dropped two strings from her fingers and began a new figure.

"Aah, the khuman compound is growing, getting close, too close. They want to cut down the ghatt trees, cut down the cotton trees, drive Fekho Band from their fields. So, I say to DeGraff, go away from my band's fields and my compound. There is free land to the east of your skyship compound. There is free land to the north of your skyship compound. Turn your eyes from my compound." The final figure was a different net of interlaced diamonds, more vertical than the earlier ones. Halley had adapted it, over nights of trial and error, from Zhettal's figure meant to scare wererabbits from her band's fields.

The sun beat down on Halley's head as she stood outside Zhettal's compound, waiting for the gates to open. Around her neck hung seven new strings—just a few, but the hair of Port Authority or Management types had gone into their making.

Zhettal pulled the gate open herself, her long nose quivering. "Tuckett! Your people will be here soon."

Halley looked at the Boons peeking from huts and hammocks, watching her with curiosity. "Let's go to your hut," she suggested.

The Boon raised one hand, tipped it side to side. "I understand." Her luminescent eyes caught the sunlight and shone as she peered at the strings around Halley's neck.

In the dim, still heat of Zhettal's hut Halley squatted and drew the strings from around her neck. "Here is a string from Sheela DeGraff." She held up the sleek, blonde loop.

The Boon tipped her hand side to side. "She it is who speaks with me most. 'No' I have said to her. 'No and no.' But she does not listen." Her nose twitched and her extended hand trembled.

A child poked its head into the hut and gabbled something in Boon. "The khumans are here, Tuckett," said Zhettal. "What will you do?"

"I have a go-away tale. I'll stay here in the hut and tell it while you talk to DeGraff." Halley arranged herself cross-legged on the packed dirt and looped DeGraff's string over her fingers.

Zhettal met the humans—a woman in a crisply starched red jumpsuit and two men in executive gray tunics—in her cotton tree grove. A child spread mats for them to sit on, but the humans declined. "Well, Zhettal, have you made a decision yet?" asked Sheela DeGraff.

The men left the talking to DeGraff and stared curiously, pointing at the Boons and their huts and hammocks. Halley recognized one of them by the cornrows in his hair. She had done them herself.

Halley took a deep breath and moved back farther into the shadows of the hut, hoping they couldn't see her sitting there. She started the figure. "Zhettal gets out of her hammock ..."

"As always, Zheela DeGraff, I tell you no," said Zhettal, standing straight and looking DeGraff in the eye. "This compound has been here four generations, and Fekho Band needs it."

"We'll replace this town with plasti-homes somewhere else on your lands. We can give you anything you want—clothing, food, even running water piped into your homes!"

"We do not need your *things*. There are other places for you to build your new compound. Go ask other bands."

"But the execs want to expand in this direction. Your chief has agreed to trade some of Fekho's land, and your band is moving farther west—you can move with them." DeGraff put her hands on her hips, her gaze wandering from Zhettal to the huts outside the grove. Halley thought she saw the woman's nose wrinkle.

Halley worked the figure again and again. She wasn't really paying attention to it anymore, just murmuring the tale and moving her hands, forming a net of diamonds, changing the net.

"Zheela DeGraff, I say *no*." Zhettal pushed down with both hands, the strong form of "no." "My cotton trees, my ghatt trees—these do not grow in a season! How many seasons will you feed us, until the trees are grown again?" Zhettal's nose quivered, and she twined her hands in the strings around her neck.

Please, Halley prayed. *This has got to work.* If Boon magic could make humans sick, Boon magic should change DeGraff's mind. But how long would it take? Zhettal had to see this work so she'd give her strings to Halley.

Continued on page 96

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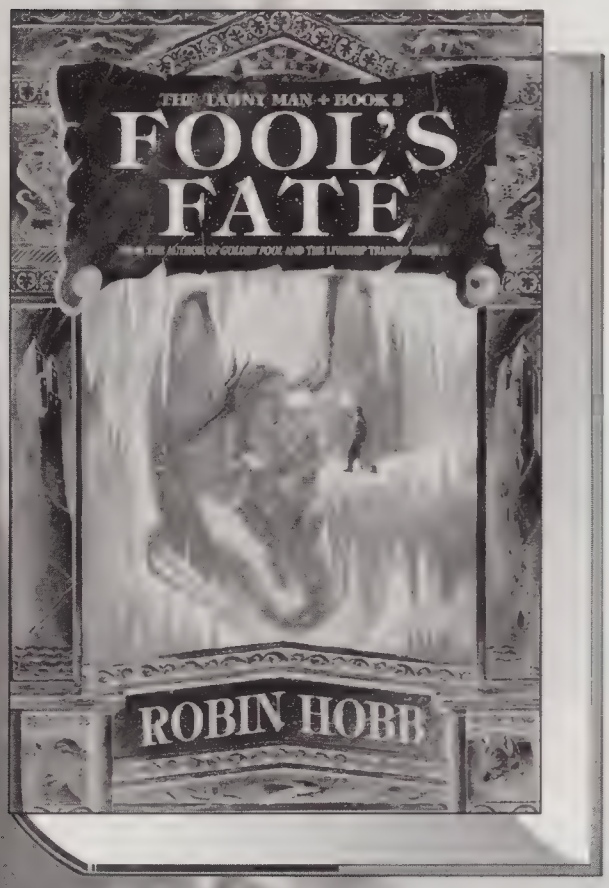

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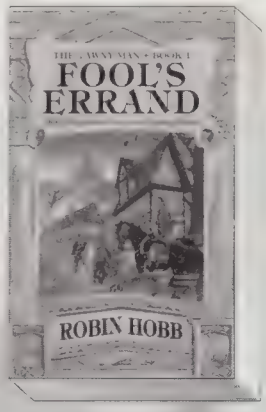

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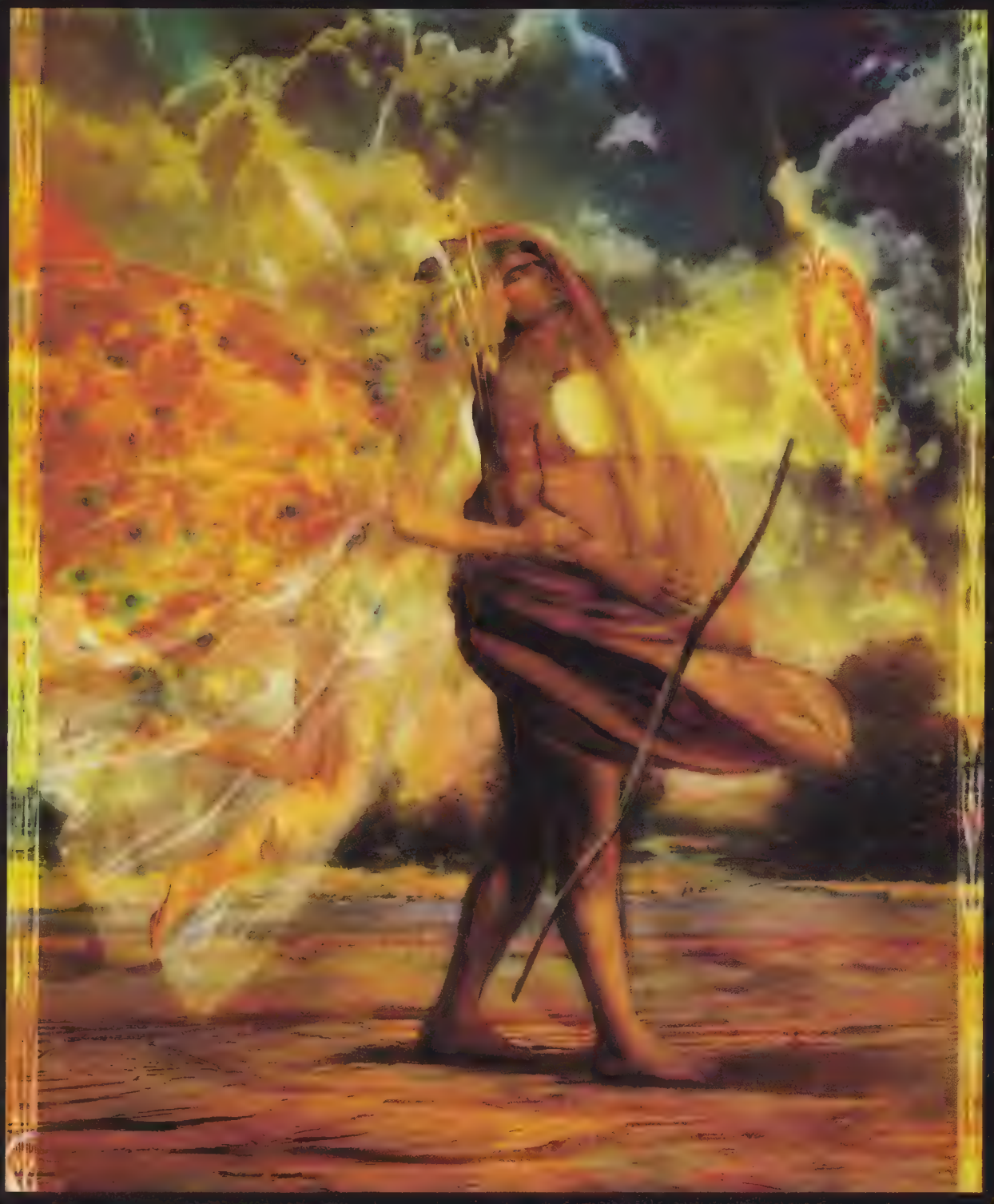


Greg Spalenka uses his artist's mirror to reveal the iconography of the human spirit through a balance of light and dark, refinement and rawness.

Working Through the Layers

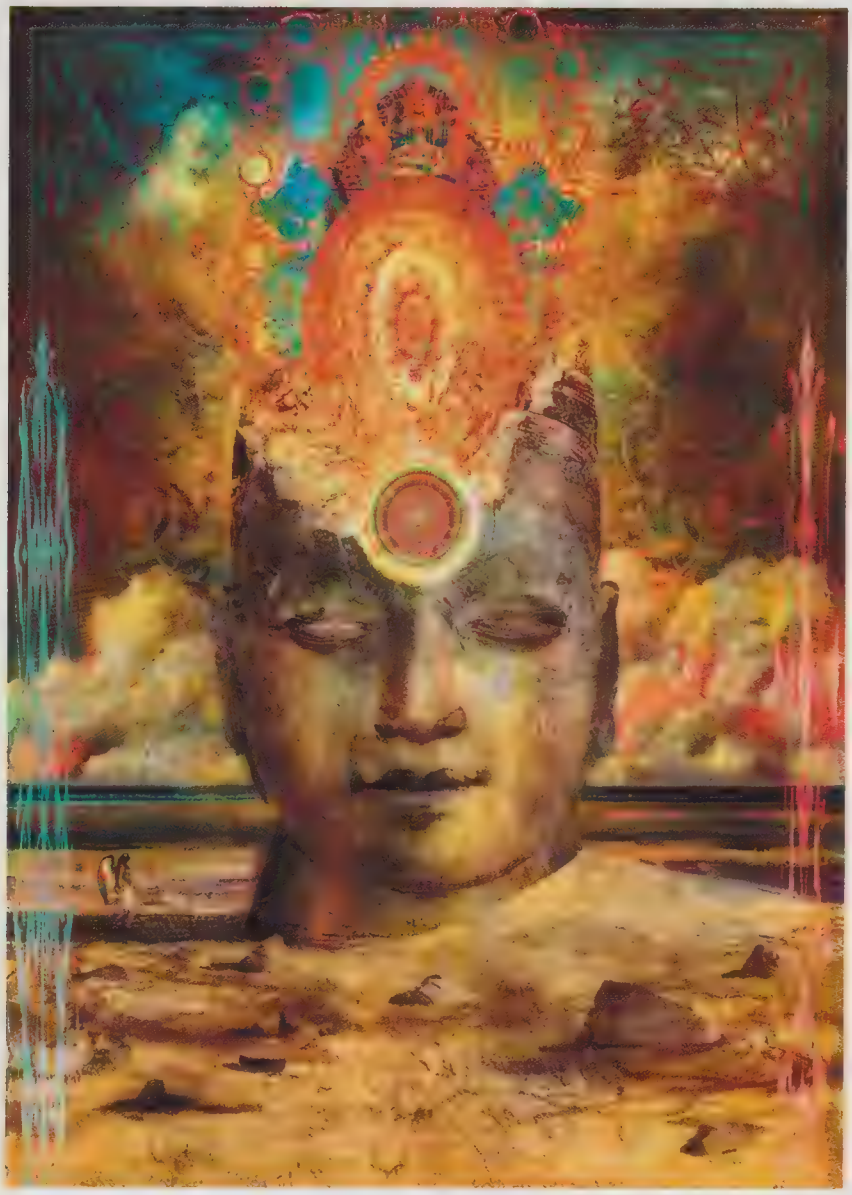
By KAREN HABER

WHEN HE WAS A LITTLE BOY, THE ELDEST OF SIX BROTHERS AND SISTERS, GREG SPALENKA WAS captivated by dark fantasy—especially Rod Serling's *Night Gallery* TV show. He was so inspired that he devised a "Walk of Horrors" in the family garage, with dummies, displays, and one of his brothers arranged in a coffin with ketchup on his face. All of the local kids paid to get in.

But Greg Spalenka's artistic path was fated to lead him out of the darkness. "From the beginning it seems as if my art was borne of two worlds," he says. "One world was sensual, dark, and mysterious, the other spiritual, light, and magical. Two sides of my nature competing for and completing my creative vision."

All through high school he read science fiction and fantasy while creating worlds on paper, sketching fantastic images of nubile women, monsters, and warriors. He won an art contest and a free pass to the San Diego Comic Con where, to his delight, he saw an original Frazetta painting.

After high school, Spalenka enrolled at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena where he began to learn about Classical and Renaissance artists. He was particularly inspired by the Symbolists and the writings of photographer Julia Margaret Cameron and of Robert Henri. Brushstroke by brushstroke, he was turning toward the light.



journey, accompanied by a book of art, tells the story of a young 14th-century mystic who learns to understand the nature of love through her visions.

Much of his deeply textured artwork is drenched with light that emanates from a palpable spirituality and lingers long in the mind's eye. "I attempt to attain a sense of the sacred in all my art," Spalenka says. "Even if the subject is dark, there is always a little light to balance it."

Meditation is a regular part of his creative process and a daily practice. "I meditate to know God. The images and the music will come and go, but the whole purpose is to go beyond the images and thoughts to a more sacred, pure space. Sometimes in the meditation I will ask for help in manifesting an image for something I may be working on at the time."

Expand Your Vision and *Ignite Thy Passion,* his acclaimed posters at the Art Institute of Southern California, were germinated by this process.

"In *Ignite Thy Passion,* I wanted an almost biblical quality to permeate the male figure to get across the feeling of the artist being the lonely wanderer. The title came to my fiancee, Roxana Villa, in a dream."

"*Expand Your Vision* was intended to convey the sense of opening up the individual's creativity. There are hints of many ancient beliefs in the busy

PREVIOUS SPREAD: (Left) A mixed-media/digital image entitled Ignite Thy Passion *was used on a poster for the Laguna College of Art and Design. (Right)* Blind Tech *illustrated an article on our obsession with technology for* Time Digital *magazine. ABOVE: Also done for a poster for the Laguna College of Art and Design, this image is called* Expand Your Vision. *OPPOSITE TOP:* Princess, *a mixed media digital image, was used on a promotional bookmark. RIGHT:* Lotus Faeries *appeared on the cover of a catalogue for the Laguna College of Art and Design.*

Today, Spalenka is an award-winning multimedia artist and musician whose clients include *Rolling Stone, Time, Newsweek, Ms., Psychology Today*, and *Playboy* magazines. His artwork has appeared on the covers of books published by HarperCollins, Viking Penguin, and Random House.

Spalenka's work can be seen in *Spectrum 9,* edited by Cathy and Arnie Fenner, where he received a Silver Award; in *Fantasy Art Masters* by Dick Jude; and on his Web site, *www.spalenka.com* He has received both gold and silver Society of Illustrator medals and has exhibited his work extensively in the United States and Japan. He has lectured and run workshops throughout the country and teaches at several different California colleges.

A drummer since the age of 12, Spalenka fused his love of music and art into *The Visions of Vespertina,* a musical and art collaboration with artist/songwriter Michelle Barnes. The musical

swarm pouring forth from the character's third eye and also subtle references to the trinity and spiritual teachers hidden within the icon storm. It was my attempt to communicate that inside us is an infinite resource of insight and wisdom, that we can all be fountainheads of creativity, that it's all locked in there somewhere and it is only a matter of knowing how to approach it to access its potential."

Spirituality and technology coexist in Spalenka's art process. He combines "old-fashioned" hand skills and digital effects while bulding layers of imagery, texture, and meaning in an elaborate collage. His work is guided by both concept and intuition.

"I work very hard at conceptualizing. In this day and age of visual bombardment I want to create something new and not use so much borrowed interest. The norm in this business is the obvious, the literal, and the cliché. There are too many editors and marketing people making decisions about art."

"That said, there is a point in my process where intuition takes over."

Spalenka begins with the manuscript, taking key words or phrases and attaching images to them. Then he begins mixing and matching metaphors. "This type of brainstorming gets a lot of unrelated images working together, increasing the possibliity of an interesting combination. At the same time, I'm looking for the foundation of a theme. There

"I attempt to attain a sense of the sacred in all my art. Even if the subject is dark, there is always a little light to balance it."

ABOVE: The evils of corporate greed are portrayed in Monster, *a mixed media digital image done for the Bay Area Press.*
OPPOSITE TOP: This image, entitled Divinus, *was done for another poster for the Laguna College of Art and Design.*
OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Daughter of the Wind *was created for a Scholastic book cover.*

is usually one idea that really sings but I may throw in another sketch or two so the art director and editor can be part of the process.

"I have a pretty good track record of hitting the conceptual nail on the head, so usually the sketch phase is brief. The fun begins as the process takes over."

He begins with photos, images drawn on illustration board, and collaged elements. After these are assembled and sealed with an acrylic medium, he paints on them with acrylic paints, sometimes applying the paint by hand and moving it around. Next he distresses the paint with sandpaper and metal scrapers and seals the results in acrylic.

His interest in distressed surfaces emerged literally by accident. During his art studies, Spalenka asked a friend and fellow artist, Matt Mahurin, to give him some objective criticism of a piece he was working on. Mahurin's response was startling. "Sometimes," he said, "you just have to know when to let a piece go." With that, he tossed the painting into the street where it was run over by several cars before Spalenka could retrieve it. As the artist recalls, "Deep gashes covered part of the surface, new textures came to light, and I realized that this treatment had actually improved the piece!"

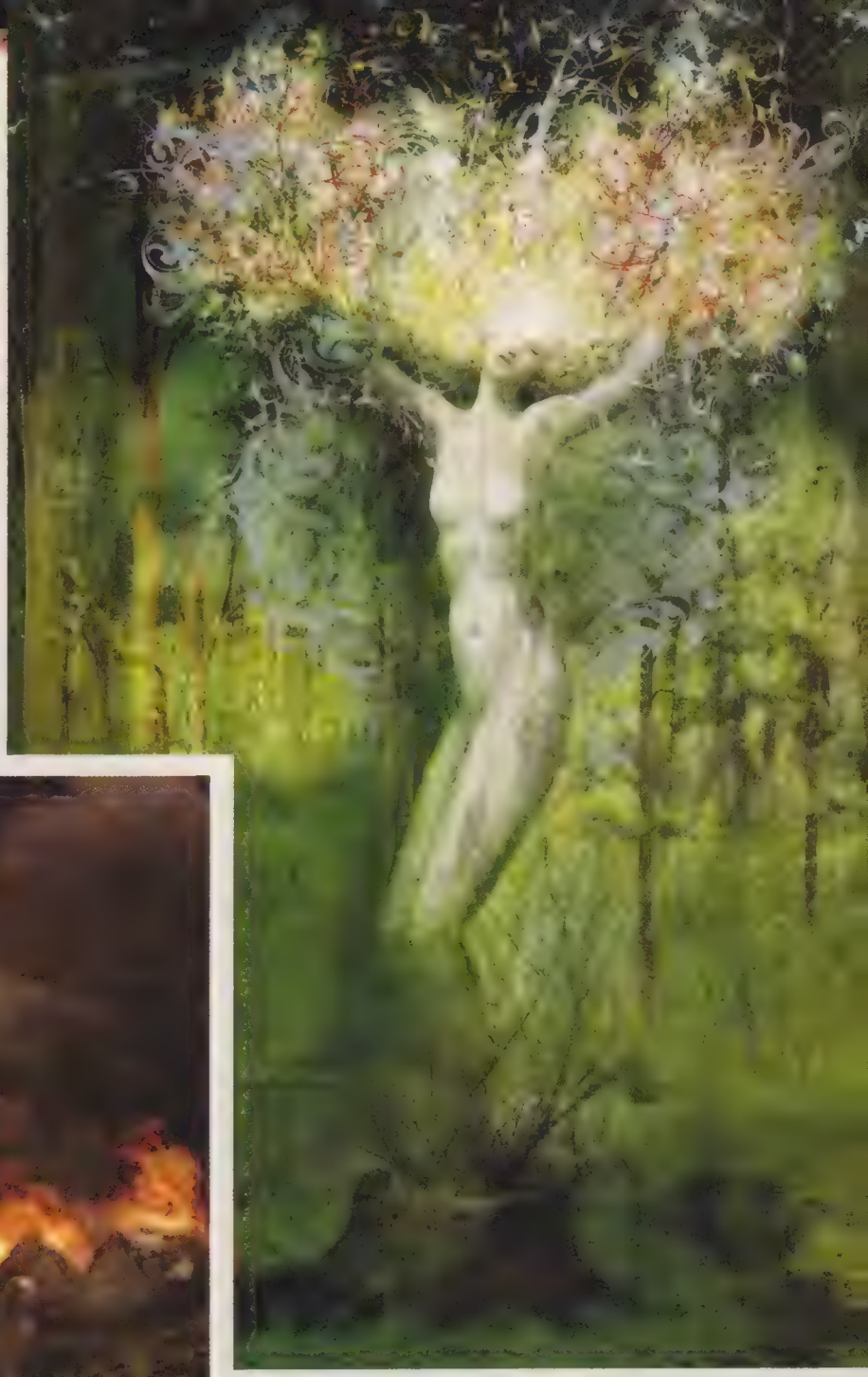
"After that, texture became increasingly important to me. I rely on what I call 'happy accidents' rather than attempt to guide it. The collage aspect of my work is very intuitive. Whatever ends up in

the final image is not based on any specific reasoning. In fact, much of the collage disappears beneath the paint. Little bits and pieces may show through in some places, turning it into texture. The symbols and images that make up the collage element are an energetic component. I believe they can be felt in a very subtle way, even though they are not seen."

As Spalenka develops each work, the process of building and destroying continues until he's achieved what he calls "a balance of refinement and rawness." At this point the artist begins to refine certain elements and images with oils.

Next he scans the art and continues the process with Photoshop. "Adding images, textures, paint in the digital realm brings the art into another world. After working in Cyberspace for a while, I may print the image out on my Epson and work again in paint."

Spalenka usually scans the work once again and finishes it in the computer. This in-and-out-of-the-box process takes him roughly three days to complete.



The effect can give an "archeological" aspect to his work as the viewer literally uncovers layers of imagery and meaning.

"Over the years, I noticed my best work seemed to express a quality that transcended the original idea or the technique. It was intangible but its presence was there."

Spalenka says that the most satisfying reaction of viewers is when they indicate that the art has touched them inside and that they, too, are inspired. For example, he cites a job he did for *Los Angeles Times Magazine* in the 1980s to illustrate an article on the hostage crisis in Lebanon.

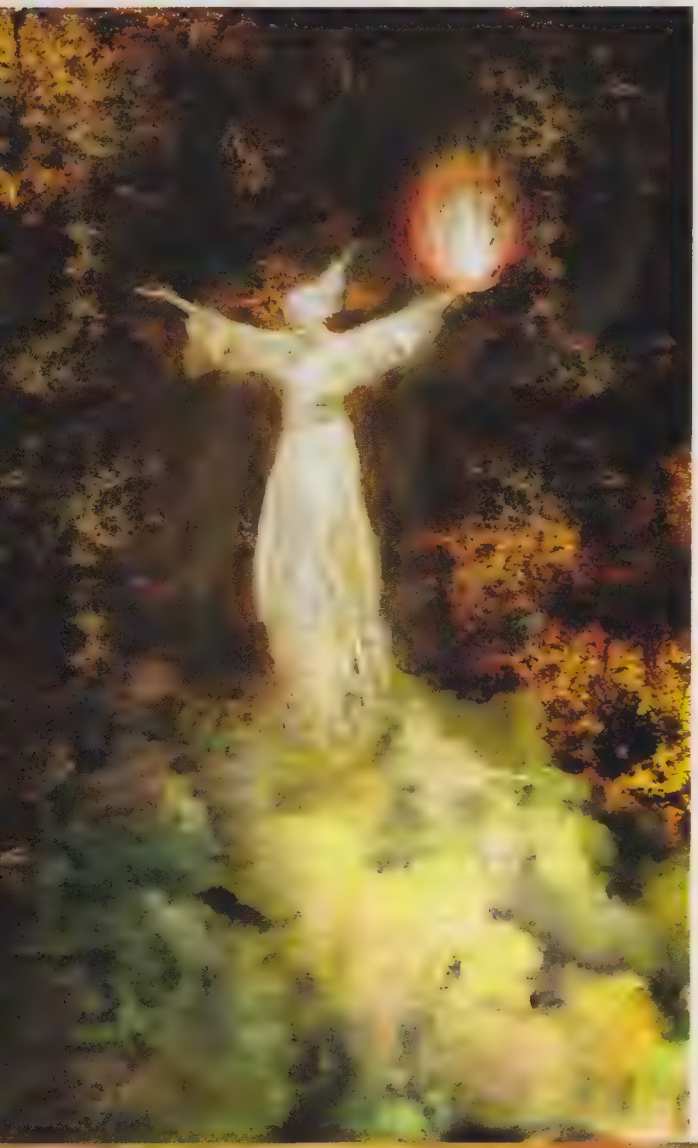
"David Jacobson was one of the hostages who

had been released from this ordeal. This was his story in which he mentioned other hostages still being held, among them Terry Anderson, a journalist.

"I illustrated different aspects of Jacobson's experience, and one of the pieces showed him with his head wrenched back looking up at a night sky. After the art was printed, I received a beautiful letter from Peggy Say, the sister of Terry Anderson. She was doing everything in her power to get Terry back and when she saw the illustrations in the magazine, especially the one of Jacobson searching the sky, it struck a chord with her. She wanted to let me know how much this art inspired her to keep doing the work to get her brother released.

"I sent her the painting. About a year later Terry was released. It was a fascinating and profound experience being a part of that history."

Rather than as prophet or agitator for social change, Spalenka sees the artist as a mirror. "The artist will always be a mirror reflecting the world around us, within us, and beyond us. Hightech or low-tech, it's all the same. It's about grasping ideas, themes, aspects of reality, and manifesting that concept or thought into a tangible form. I want to tap into the iconography of the human spirit. When I feel that I have touched an intimate part of God within me and can visually share that with others, it is deeply fulfilling."



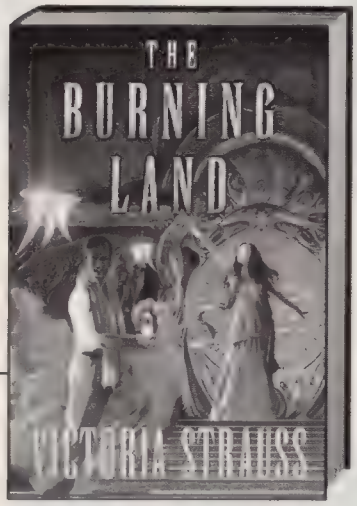
In his work Spalenka attempts to reflect themes that relate to the human condition and spirit. "In searching for a commonality or universal relativity, I hopefully connect with a wide audience. So whatever the subject, I want the art to express its core issue on conceptual, visceral, and intuitive levels. All these qualities must be present in the art for it to feel complete or whole."

One part high-tech magician, one part mystic, and 100 percent artist, Greg Spalenka is constantly plumbing the depth of his soul and returning to the surface with ideas and art that inspire and awe both the artist and the viewer.

NOTE: Greg Spalenka's Web address is: www.spalenka.com. He is a regular exhibitor at the San Diego Comics Con.

ABOVE: Simon & Schuster commissioned The Fallen: Reckoning *for a book cover.*
LEFT: Illuminare *was created as a book cover for* The Visitor *by Sheri S. Tepper, published by Tor.*

EOS.. TRANSCEND THE ORDINARY



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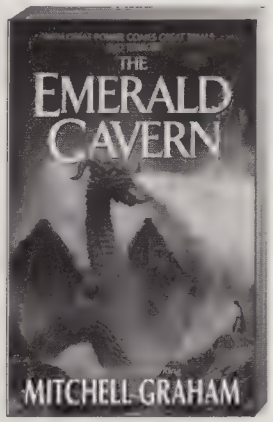

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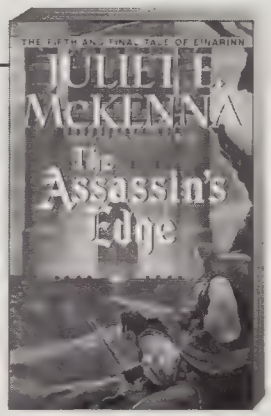

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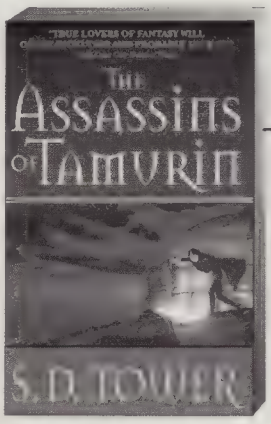

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Hearts' Desires

By Nina Kiriki Hoffman
Illustration by Laurie Harden

When offered our heart's desire, how many of us would be brave enough to reach out and take it? Don't answer too quickly...

MY BEST FRIEND PENNY'S CREEPY OLDER BROTHER, TIM, told us not to go down the Keel Road cul-de-sac. He said there weren't any houses there. I thought he might be right. It was way after dark, almost time to retire from trick-or-treating for the night, and when Tim flashed his flashlight down the street, it flicked over a lot of stunted pine trees shaped by a constant sea wind, leaning away inland. But after Tim turned off his flashlight, Penny said she saw orange light on what looked like somebody's front porch, and Tim and I looked again, and I thought maybe she was right.

We already had bags full of Halloween loot. My homemade snot costume, Goodwill clothes I'd spray-painted yellow and green, didn't offer me much protection from the cold. Penny's sparkly pink Ballerina Barbie costume looked way too perky for the two-hour pounding it had already taken.

Ballerina Barbie. I mean. We were in sixth grade. When was she going to get over that stuff? She had shot down every suggestion for a costume I had offered. No witch, cat, ghost, demon, or even Jedi Knight for Penny. It took me way too long to realize she just really, really wanted to be Ballerina Barbie, even though she'd been that last year too. My mouth, which moved much faster than my mind, got me in trouble a lot, but usually not with Penny. We'd been friends since kindergarten. I wasn't sure she had forgiven me for the things I had said about her costume yet, but we had collaborated on getting loot all evening, even if we weren't speaking much to each other.

I shifted my green spray-painted pillowslip full of candy to my other hand. It was way heavy. I was ready to head home to see what we'd gotten, but Penny said, "Let's go to one last house," and because I had been bad to her, I agreed, the way I had with every suggestion she'd made all night. At least when she was suggesting things she was talking to me. Sort of.

Maybe we'd meet another nice dog. I was happy to meet dogs anytime.

Actually there were three houses in the cul-de-sac. Only one of them was lit, but boy, was it lit well. Perched on the porch railing were two terrific pumpkins with really scary, jagged teeth and mean eyeholes, and even though I knew there were just candles inside them, it looked like demon fire.

I was almost too scared to climb the stairs, but Penny and I were being fearless that night, so we went up and rang the bell.

The door opened to more orange light. A witch stood in the doorway. She had wild black hair down to her butt, and she wore a black chiffon dress with little scarfy points around her wrists and the bottom hem. The smell coming from that house was weird— cinnamon, apple cider, and swampy leaves. The witch held out a bowl of small lumpy things wrapped in brown paper. "Will you reach for your heart's desire?"

Then she jerked the bowl back before we even picked anything—and jeeze, it didn't even look like candy, so maybe we shouldn't take any, right? If it *was* candy, it looked homemade, which meant Penny's parents would confiscate it anyway—and said, "Who's that?"

"That's just Tim," Penny said.

Penny's parents had ordered Tim to watch over us while we trick-or-treated or else they wouldn't have let us go at all, but I still had trouble being grateful.

Tim stood on the flagstone path behind us. He wasn't even in costume, just wore tennis shoes, jeans, and a gray hooded sweatshirt. He looked like he always did: tall, hunched over, his face long and lean, his long skinny-fingered hands tucked into his armpits. Tim loomed even when he was standing still. His thick-lensed glasses had spots of pumpkin-flame in them.

For a second, he flickered. For a second, I saw a different Tim: standing straight, back unbent, eyes unhidden, taller than anyone I knew, dressed in some kind of robe nobody would ever really wear.

What?

He turned back into True Tim.

Why was he swaying?

"Tim?" said Penny. "Are you OK?"

"No," he whispered. "Sorry." He clutched at his chest. He tumbled to the grass beside the flagstone path.

Gawdang. He had sworn up and down to us and to Penny's parents that he was feeling fine and he'd taken his meds. On his good days, Tim was still the guy I'd fallen in love with at first sight. Such a crush I had on him. Of course, I was nine at the time and I had no taste, and Tim had a sweet smile and he'd managed to teach even a math bonehead like me how to play cards. I didn't find out till later that Tim had a lot of bad days mixed in with the good ones.

Penny jumped down the stairs and ran to her brother. I followed, knelt next to him too. "Tim?" Penny said, her voice half swallowed.

"Sorry, Pen. Sorry, April." He lay on his back, shoulders in their perpetual forward curl, breath whistling in and out. "I thought I was OK. I shoulda been OK."

Penny turned toward the porch and yelled, "Call 9-1-1," but the witch was right beside us.

"What's wrong with him?" she asked.

"He has a disease," Penny said. "Marfan Syndrome. Could you call us an ambulance, please?"

The witch laid her hand on Tim's forehead. "Young one. Find your heart's desire." She set the bowl of weird treats on his stomach. He opened his eyes and stared up at her, then fumbled in the bowl for one of the little packages.

"What are you doing? He needs *help*." Penny jumped up and headed for the porch.

"I don't have a phone," said the witch. "That's the one you want?" she asked Tim.

"Uh-huh."

The witch took her bowl off his stomach, and Tim just lay there, the treat he'd picked loose in his slack hand. "April," he whispered. "Could you open this for me?"

I jerked out of my awake coma. Tim had a disease? I knew he had his ups and downs. Sometimes he did things with me and Penny like take us to movies or the mall, sometimes he stayed in bed all day, and sometimes he was just odd, but a disease?

Was it contagious? All those times I'd imagined kissing him, yech!

No, wait. Tim was sick. I should care about him. I *did* care about him. Sometimes I thought he was creepy, but he *was* my best friend's brother.

Was it something I could get from touching his hand?

Penny would have warned me if it was. Right?

Penny had raced into the house and back out. She ran to the next house and knocked on the door. A light turned on inside.

I took the little brown package from Tim's hand and glanced at the witch. "Can't you cast a spell on him?"

"It's something he has to do for himself," she said. "But you may help in this one small way."

I unwrapped the treat. It was a giant red-orange gumdrop. It glowed like a Christmas light.

"Candy?" I said. "The guy has a fainting fit and you treat it with candy?"

Tim plucked the gumdrop out of my hand. He stared at it, then glanced at the witch. "My heart's desire?" he whispered.

"Your choice," she said.

"It's a trick!" I reached for the gumdrop.

Tim dropped it into his mouth. He chewed slowly. Orange light leaked out between his teeth.

I felt this sickening meltdown in my stomach. What if it was poison?

"Aahh," Tim said. He closed his eyes. A smile stretched his mouth.

Penny raced back. "They're on their way. What happened?"

The witch rose, dusted off her dress, and picked up the bowl of treats. "Heart's desire?" She offered it to me.

One of the lumps looked—yellow and good.

I reached for the bowl.

I snatched my hand back.

The witch smiled and went inside the house. As the door shut behind her, the flames in the pumpkins snuffed out.

"What happened?" Penny shook Tim. "Are you all right?"

Tim opened his eyes. He stared up at me. Already he was changing: his shoulders flattened out of their constant forward hunch, and his breath had stopped hissing. I didn't know then what had happened inside him, but an impulse came over me. I bent down to touch my lips to his.

The ambulance roared up with lights flashing and sirens keening, and paramedics jumped out. I sat with the taste of heart's desire on my lips as they checked Tim's vital signs, got him onto a stretcher, took him to the ambulance.

I licked my lips. I tasted clouds and blueberries and cider, and a future where I graduated from vet school and had my own clinic and made cats and dogs well.

Penny was shaking me. "April! What is *wrong* with you? What happened while I was gone?"

I glanced at the witch's front door. The house looked deserted now, falling-down nasty.

They let us ride to the hospital in the front of the ambulance. I peeked in back and saw the paramedic talking to Tim. Tim nodded and gripped the guy's hand.

One of the little brown lumps in that bowl had looked better to me than the others. I could almost imagine it in my hand, but not quite.

Not quite. ❧

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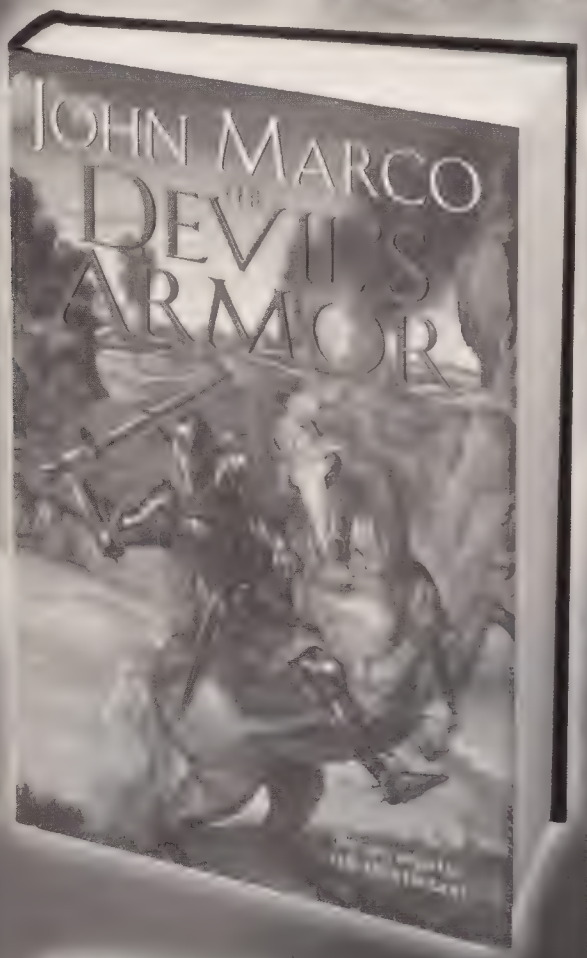

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By Eric T. Baker

Online gaming brings a new element to the much-loved *Final Fantasy* series.

There are five playable races in *Final Fantasy XI,* the world developed by Square Enix for the PC, each of which begins the game in one of four Realms: The Hume are the humans; the Elvaan are the big, human-sized elves; the Tarutaru, small, hobbit-sized elves; the Mithra cat women; and the Galka trolls. Compared to other online role-playing games, the amount of initial customization for the characters' looks is minimal. As a starting character, playing at a peak time, players are almost assured of seeing another character with the same size, shape, face, hair, and clothes as their character. As the character earns and loots money to buy clothes, equipment, and accessories, running into the character's twin becomes less common.

Unlike the several recent PSWs, there is no attempt in *FFXI* to encourage players to build their own homes and shops. All characters are assigned a room when they start the game. The characters can decorate and use the room for storage, but they can't have other characters over, and they can't open it to the public. The mechanics of the game do encourage all characters to take up a tertiary profession as an artisan of one sort or another. The characters can keep the items they produce, as will probably be the case with arrows and bullets, or they can sell the items on an eBay-like market, which is also the best way to cash in loot. In this way, the economy is player-based, but no one has to spend online time keeping up a shop.

Draconians are just one of many races that play a part in the Dragonlance campaign setting.

Economy to the side, the focus of *FFXI* is combat. The starting professions are warrior, monk, white mage, black mage, and red mage. As the character rises in level, other professions become available,

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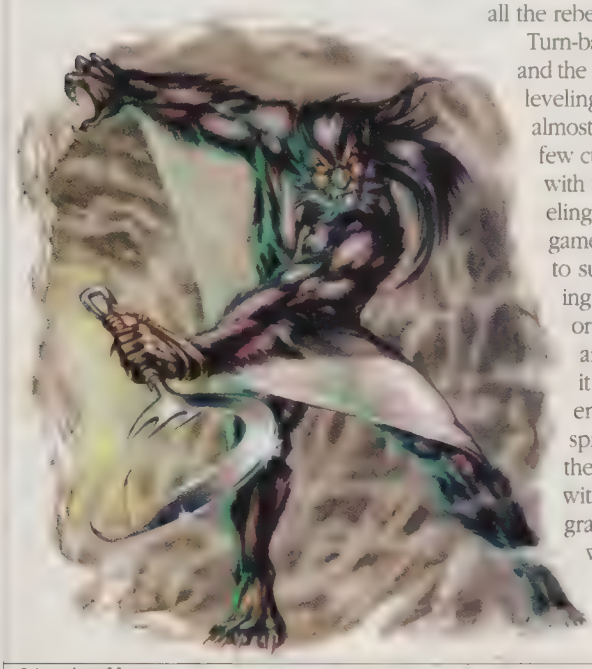
but they all keep a martial focus. Broadly, the goal is to win greater territory for the character's home city, but specifically, the goal is to improve the character's level so that it can add a second class, make use of the air ships and the chocobos mounts, and be able to fight the big and interesting monsters while engaging in a series of quests.

Just as the economy encourages players to spend some time making their characters artisans as well as adventurers, so the combat and chat systems encourage players to team their characters with other characters of the same level. Experience points are awarded based on damage done to the monster, so if characters of different levels adventure together, the lion's share of the points will go to the higher level character. While it is always easier to kill the monsters by fighting them as a group, the highest level, most dangerous monsters have to be fought by a group or groups. A single character simply has no chance.

Overall, fans of fantasy anime and fans of the *Final Fantasy* games will like *FFXI*. The graphics are beautiful and stylish. The controls (because the designers originally wrote the game to be played on the PS2) contain more menus than are needed on a PC, but do have a short learning curve. The game's challenges are numerous and interesting. As with any PSW, though, the players ultimate experience with the game will rest on the other players they meet and on finding a group to adventure with that suits them.

Another RPG that started out in Japan but stayed on the PS2 is *Disgaea: Hour of Darkness* from Atlus and by Nippon Ichi Software. Whereas *FFXI* has 3-D graphics, relatively simple game play, and is a PSW, *D:HoD* has 2-D graphics, very complex game play, and is for a single player. In *D:HoD*, players take the role of Laharl, a prince of the Underworld whose father has died while Laharl was engaged in a nap that lasted two years. Unlike most RPG heroes, Laharl is not a good guy. He reacts to his father's death by setting out to conquer back all the rebellious lands of the Underworld.

Turn-based combat and leveling up Laharl and the up to 10 members of his party, plus leveling up their weapons and items, is almost the whole of the game. There are few cut-scenes and all of them are done with the game engine. Combat and leveling are so complex, however, that the game demands all the player's attention to succeed. Take the process of leveling up weapons. In most games, gems or some other ingredients are found and added to a weapon to improve it. In *D:HoD*, the party actually enters the weapons and fights the spirits within them. Clearing one of the weapon's levels unlocks a spirit with a distinct profession who then grants powers and bonuses to the weapon. Unlocked spirits can be moved from weapon to weapon and can combine to create even more effects.



It is clear that *D:HoD* programmers had absolutely no fear of the player's characters becoming too powerful. If the players are willing to put in the time, they can build characters and items, all of which will have levels into the hundreds. Ridiculous is the word for how powerful it is possible for Laharl's party to become, and yet there is always another challenge ready to test it. Ultimately, this is not a game for newcomers to strategy RPGs. For veteran players, particularly those who

have always felt held back in other RPGs, this is a game to be loved.

A game with a Japanese background but that From Software created and Sega distributed for the Xbox is *Otogi: Myth of Demons*. Not an RPG, although the main character levels-up and earns gold that he uses to buy better weapons, *O:MoD* is an action game where the focus is on killing lots of monsters from Japanese legend and smashing up the world along the way.

The protagonist of *O:MoD* is Raikoh, a human summoned back from the dead by the mysterious Princess. Throughout the game, Raikoh never speaks and the player never gets to see his eyes; the princess is never seen at all. She serves as the narrator and mission briefer. There are 25 missions, most of which consist of Raikoh killing everything in sight and hunting down anything that isn't, but there are also timed run levels and levels where he has to defend something.

The two best features of *O:MoD* work together. The graphics are amazing, and most of any given level is destructible. If Raikoh is fighting in a bamboo forest, then the trees slice and fall as his weapon swings. If he is fighting in a multileveled castle, walls are smashed to pieces either by Raikoh's sword or by the enemies that have been blown backward by the force of his blows. The art, the breaking battlegrounds, and the low-key, introspective dialogue from both the Princess and the boss

monsters lend the game a dark feel and style that is really earned rather than simply stated. An excellent game for those who like to slay enemies by the horde, or for people who want to see their Xbox's graphics hardware in its full glory.

Meanwhile, the coolest new thing for the PS2 is not just a game. It is the Eye Toy, a combination of a webcam and 12 mini-games. The Eye Toy can be used to record video messages for a friend of up to a minute in length, but its real mission is to take the controller out of players' hands and let them use their own bodies as part of the game action. With the webcam, Eye Toy inserts the player's image into the game so that the player sees himself at the center of the screen while the game's characters appear around the edges of the screen. The player interacts with the characters by simply moving his or her hands, arms, and even head.

Logistically, the Eye Toy is easy to set up and connect. The hardest part is finding a background with a solid color for the player to stand in front of that also allows the player to have a full view of the TV screen. Once it is set up, the Eye Toy is perfect for friends and family members who don't usually play games. There is no controller to master and they get to watch themselves on TV. More games using the Eye Toy are on the way, but even with the starting ones there are hours of single and family fun to be had.

Orpheus is a brand new paper and dice RPG from White Wolf, but this one is a little different. Instead of being open ended, *Orpheus* is a limited series; there will ultimately be six books to buy, each one expanding the world and peeling back another layer of the back story. The object of this format is

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to give it the feel and pacing of an epic novel. It is that strangest of animals—a paper and dice RPG with an actual ending.

The story is set in our modern world, except it's a world where a certain kind of magic/science works, a discipline that allows those who have mastered it to astrally project from their bodies and speak with the spirits of the dead. Some do this for science, some for fun, but most do it for money. There is a combination of the *Sixth Sense* and the Anita Blake books going on here.

Mechanically and structurally, *Orpheus* is like most White Wolf games. The characters are divided into different classes, called Laments, which address how the character makes it into the spirit world. The character's Spite level determines how much control the players have over their character. Each Lament has different powers available to them and how they use those powers determines their Spite level.

An interesting addition to the *World of Darkness*, *Orpheus* is a good game so far, and it should only get better.

Twenty years after *Dragonlance* was invented, Wizards of the Coast has published a new hard cover, 288-page, full-color campaign setting book for the world, updating it and fully translating it to the Third Edition rules of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Margaret Weis is one of the authors and Tracy Hickman wrote the foreword.

The book contains 14 chapters and includes two complete adventures. All the player races are addressed, as are most of the nonplayer ones. The dragons get their own chapter, of course, which includes rules on the Dragon Overlords and aerial combat. There are chapters on the current world of Krynn and on its history. Iconic characters like Linsha Majere and Lord Ausric Krell are written up, and there are sidebars on everything from the Mad Gnomes to Unique Dragonlances. For fans new and old, this is the supplement to begin a *Dragonlance* campaign or to reinvigorate one that has fallen aside. ❧

power sources

Continued from page 78

Sheela DeGraff shook her head slightly, put her fingertips to her temples. "We can give you fertilizer and growth compounds to help your trees grow. If we promise to feed your people, Zhettal, will you give us your land?"

"The foods you khumans like are not healthy for Eblekh Zai."

"So we'll give you the kind you like, for heaven's sake." DeGraff shook her fists to emphasize her frustration.

Zhettal backed off a step and stared into the open doorway of her hut. Halley didn't think the Boon could see her, but held the figure up as she worked it.

DeGraff turned away from the Boon. "Fekho Band isn't interested in plasti-homes, fine food, all the other things we offer." It wasn't a question.

"No." Zhettal pushed down with her palms again, and stayed looking at the ground, her shoulders hunched.

"Your chief will be angry that you will not let us build on your land." DeGraff rubbed her eyes and shook her head again.

"He understands."

"We will offer all these fine things to some other band, and your band will go without."

Zhettal drew air through her teeth in a long hiss, straightened slowly, and looked DeGraff in the eye again. A smile lit her hairy face. "May another band *want* the things you offer."

DeGraff beckoned to the two aides, turned on her heel, and walked out of the compound. Zhettal watched the three humans get into their scooter, a curious expression on her face.

Halley put DeGraff's string around her neck and ran out of the hut. "It worked! Zhettal, it worked! She left, and she doesn't want to destroy your compound!"

"You are a strong taleweaver, khuman Tuckett." Zhettal looked at the braided strings around Halley's neck curiously. "Tuckett, will you teach me how to make these strings?"

"Will you bargain? I want back all the strings you're using to make my people sick. Let me deal with the khumans from now on." Halley looked into Zhettal's eyes. She didn't feel like a mere laborer, but an equal with the old taleweaver.

"I will give you the strings." Zhettal started to sort through the strings around her neck, then stopped and caught Halley's gaze. "You are a taleweaver of power. Fekho Band would be happy to have you."

In all the months Halley had worked with Tlakh, he had never offered to admit her to his band. "I'd have to think about it. Your chieftain will accept this?" Halley asked.

"*I* choose new taleweavers. There will be no problem." Zhettal dropped her eyes and twined her fingers in the strings around her neck. "But I must ask something else."

"What's that?" asked Halley.

"Will you give me the string you made from Gezzet's hair? He hides all day in his hut and is no good to the band." The old Boon looked back at Halley, her nose quivering.

"I think I can do that." Halley grinned.

Halley carried a bulging bag to the waste slot in the courtyard behind her apartment building. She didn't need the rest of the hair she had gathered during Trisha's half-price haircut sale. She fingered the strings around her neck. What was she going to do with twenty-two strings twined from the hair of anonymous citizens of Grayplain? She didn't know how to get rid of a living string properly.

The cotton tree in the courtyard, the one she'd gathered cotton from just last year, looked pathetic. Its leaves were curling up, its branches drooping. "That thing needs water!"

On the stairs back up to her apartment, Halley paused. The tree. She'd made a string from its cotton, and used it over and over just a week ago to lure Gezzet into her trap. Had *she* wilted it? Tlakh had talked about using up energy. She must have drawn the power to trap Gezzet from this tree.

She bounded back out into the courtyard, found the gardener's hose, and turned the water on at the tree's base. Droplets splashed up, glinting in the sun's rays. Poor thing, she'd nearly killed it. If she was going to work magic, she'd have to protect her power sources.

The phone's message light blinked in Halley's room when she got home from Trisha's three days later. "Ms. Tuckett," a bored-looking secretary type drawled, "Meng Brothers is pleased to inform you that the planetary quarantine will lift tomorrow. Report to work at your usual time. Thank you." The screen blanked.

It had worked.

As she waited outside Tlakh's compound for the gate to open she could feel Boons—no, Eblekh Zai, she ought to use their real name—watching her from the ghatt trees. When Tlakh opened the gate and welcomed her in, his face twisted in a comical way as he stared at the many strings around her neck.

He ushered her into his hut, away from the staring eyes of his family and apprentices, and she told him the whole story—including Zhettal's offer to make her a member of Fekho Band.

Tlakh squatted in the dirt, his eyes never leaving her strings. "Khallee, you have much to learn, but not even Pellag, best of my apprentices, could create a new figure as you did. The choice is yours, Khallee. Fekho or Ghuxi. I would be proud to have you in my band."

Business was booming at Trisha's when Halley stopped by a few days later. "Yo, Halley, you got time today?" called Trisha as she walked in.

"Sorry, Trisha, I don't. In fact, I probably won't be in much at all. I've got a new job, and it takes a lot of my time." Grinning, Halley touched the red circles tattooed under her eyes. ❧

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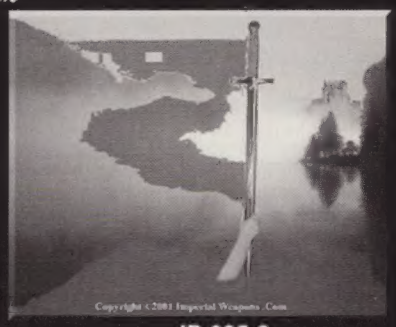

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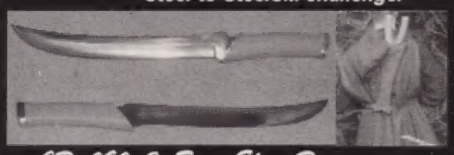

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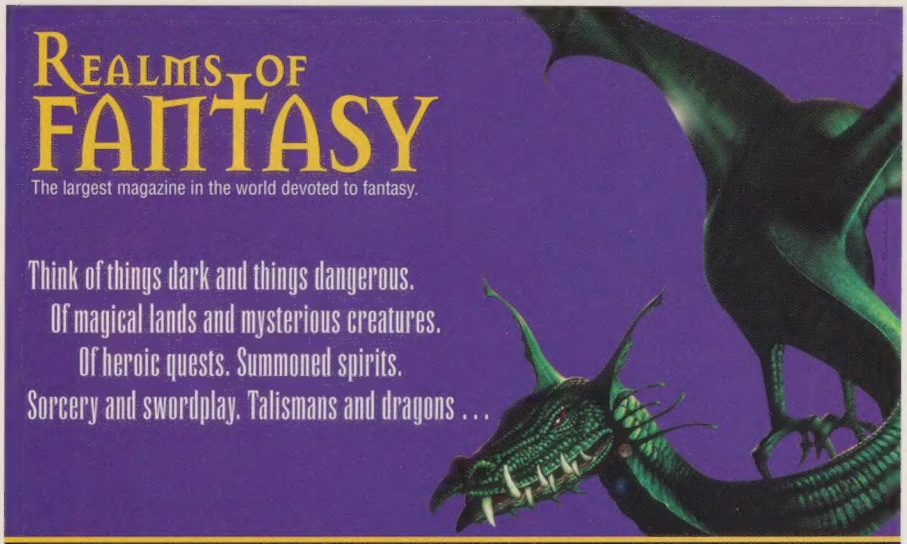
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flowers tekheli

Continued from page 69

"There is one poem," Fairuza faltered. "The poem to Tekheli." But the form of the poetess was breaking up, turning to the intricate curls of words and drifting away into snow. Fairuza woke to an open window and the sounds of morning.

That afternoon, telling no one, she went to the bus station and caught the weekly bus south to Almaty. The bus went up over the high pass, close to the cairn and the site of the accident. Fairuza told the bus driver that she was visiting herder relatives; he let her get off at the edge of the road. With the poem in her pocket, she set off up the ridge toward the cairn. She read the poem over the poetess's grave, taking as much care over the old phrasing as she could, and then she read it again.

When she looked up, the poetess was standing before her. She was a small woman, shorter even than Fairuza, and she was not beautiful. She looked solid, unlike a ghost. She said, grudgingly, "You read that well enough, but the stress was sometimes wrong."

"I'm not a bard. I'm a language student. I've come to make a bargain with you. I've come for my brother."

"I told you. He's mine. I won't let him go."

"Not even if I give you back your voice?"

The poetess grew still.

"How would you do such a thing?"

Fairuza took a deep breath.

"There are no copies of your poems, except this one. But you are known as a bard—people still remember you." She was thinking of the ambulance driver Mikhail. "Times have changed since the Soviet Union collapsed. All the old political figures have gone."

The poetess's face twisted. "What is this to me?"

"They have taken away the statues to Lenin, to Brezhnev. There are only empty plinths left, and so much of Kazakh history has been lost, there aren't enough figures to fill them. If I could ask the town council to erect a statue to you, with this poem inscribed on the base, would that satisfy you?"

The poetess was silent. Then she said, "I will consider it. Go back to the road and wait. There, I will give you your answer."

Fairuza walked down the ridge. When she reached the road, she turned and looked back. The poetess was nowhere to be seen, but there was a figure standing by the cairn: a boy in a red jacket, looking around him, bewildered.

Later that spring, Fairuza walked under the budding oaks to the library. It was warmer now, and the path that led to the library steps was lined with a scattering of flowers. The new statue stood with her back to the building, looking toward Tekheli and the high steppe. Fairuza paused for a moment, gazing up at the statue, then she went into the library and found a quiet corner. Taking the notebook from her bag, she sat down and started to write. ❧

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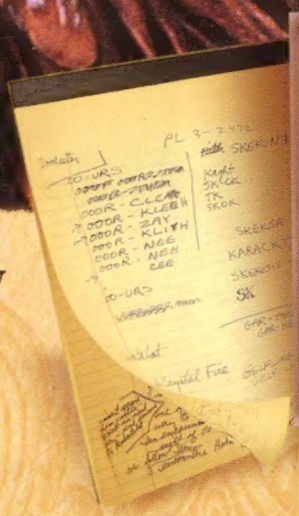

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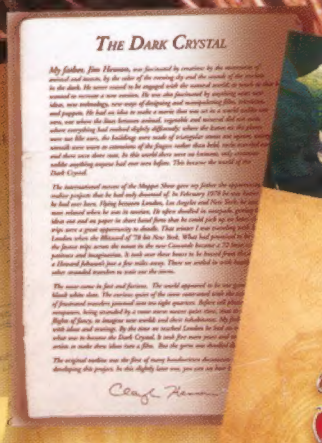

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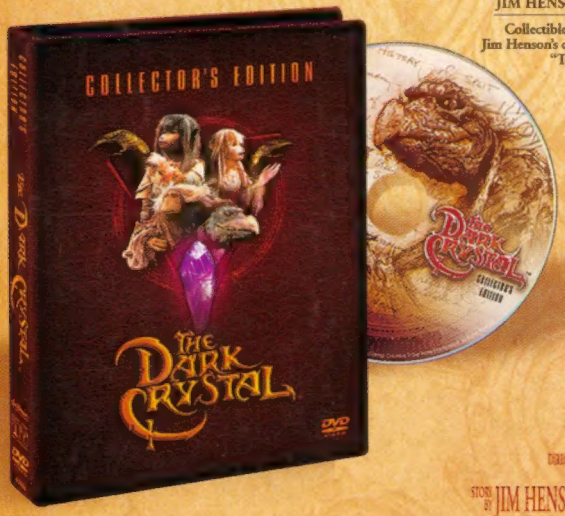

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